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Wild Madness in Middle English Literature

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Preface

In 1384, after a long legal procedure, Emma de Beston was found to be not in possession of her mental faculties and consequently unfit for the administration of her lands and possessions.[1] In the mind of the modern reader, this information might evoke dark and isolated cells in cold towers, inhuman methods, very close to torture, to test the poor woman's sanity, appalling therapies to cure her, and maybe even stakes and accusations of witchcraft. In the case of Emma, even though the whole process took a long time, the matter was settled in much more modern and less dramatic terms. She was asked some simple questions in order to assess whether she was able to use her reason and common sense and was assigned a tutor who was to look after her and her lands. Since the decision was believed to be unsatisfactory, after further investigation about her state of mind, a new arrangement was found. Despite modern stereotypes about medieval culture, being mad in the Middle Ages had more complex, even though less "Gothic", implications than one might expect.

This is certainly not the first work which addresses the theme of madness; the abundance of studies about medieval insanity in literature and culture somehow mirrors the multifaceted nature of this subject. The undisputed milestone in this field is certainly Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique* (1972);[2] the work was the result of the re-elaboration of his doctoral dissertation "Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique" (1961),[3] where the theme of insanity is explored from the late Middle Ages to the modern age. Similarly, Judith S. Neaman's Ph.D. thesis "The

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[1] For a complete analysis of the case see David Roffe, Christine Roffe, "Madness And Care In The Community: A Medieval Perspective", *British Medical Journal*, 311, 1995, pp. 1708-1712.
[2] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie a l'Âge Classique*, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1964.
[3] Michel Foucault, "Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique", doctoral diss., Université de Paris, 1961.

Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romances" (1968)[4] was the starting point for her monograph *Suggestion of the Devil: the Origins of Madness* (1975);[5] both her works focus on the Anglo-Norman area and on the medieval period, but while in "The Distracted Knight", she analyses the many forms of madness which occur in Arthurian Romance, in *Suggestions of the Devil* she explores the medieval juxtaposition between the theological visions about madness and the medical theories of the time. In the same years, Penelope B. R. Doob published her monograph *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (1974)[6] which deals with medieval archetypal representations of madness.

All these works present, to some extent, an interdisciplinary approach and cover different aspects of medieval mental illnesses and lunatics. This methodology was maintained also in most later studies, both in generic works about insanity in the Middle Ages, such as Muriel Laharie's *La Folie au Moyen Âge* (1991),[7] or *Le Discours du Fou au Moyen Âge* (1992)[8] by Jean-Marie Fritz, and in monographs with a more literary focus, like Stephen Harper's doctoral thesis "The Subject of Madness: Insanity, Individuals and Society in Late-medieval English Literature" (1997),[9] published as a monograph in 2003,[10] Laura Jose's dissertation "Madness and Gender in Late-medieval English Literature" (2010)[11] or Sylvia Huot's *Madness in Medieval French Literature:*

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4   Judith Silverman Neaman, "The Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romances", doctoral diss. Columbia University, 1968.

5   Judith Silverman Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil: the Origins of Madness*, New Yok: Anchor Books, 1975.

6   Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

7   Muriel Laharie, *La Folie au Moyen Âge: XI-XIII siècles*, Paris: Le Leopard d'Or, 1991.

8   Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le Discours du Fou au Moyen Âge, XIIe-XIIIe Siècles, Étude Comparée des Discours Littéraire, Médical, Juridique et Théologique de la Folie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992.

9   Stephen Harper, "The Subject of Madness: Insanity, Individuals and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature", doctoral diss. University of Glasgow, 1997.

10   Stephen Harper, *Insanity, Individuals, and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature: the Subject of Madness*, Lewinston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.

11   Laura Jose, "Madness and Gender in Late-Medieval English Literature", doctorar diss. University of Durham, 2010.

Identities Found and Lost (2003),[12] and even more specific works such as the collection of essays *Madness in Medieval Law and Custom* (2010),[13] edited by Wendy Turner, where the legal aspects of madness are analysed.

It is not surprising that many of the above mentioned authors decided to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. Iconographic or medical sources often provide useful information that in other contexts is implied; besides, as can be inferred from the case of Emma de Beston, being a lunatic in the Middle Ages had practical, moral, and legal consequences on the life of the madman or madwoman as well as of the other members of the community, not unlike what happens nowadays. As Neaman puts it, "at the risk of sounding like Polonius, [one needs to take into account] material medical, biblical, theological, philosophical, biographical, and legal".[14] The complexity of the implications of madness in the Middle Ages is reflected also in the variety of different manifestations of insanity in literature. Madness can be genuine or feigned, like Tristan's in the *Folie Tristan*; it can be a mystical madness, like the one described in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, or a lover's melancholy or even something more modern and introspective, like Hoccleve's mental disturbances.

Such works as those mentioned above are thus a helpful tool for readers approaching the subject of madness in medieval literature, but I believe a tighter focus might be equally interesting. This study will therefore be centred on a specific type of madness, here conventionally referred to as "wild madness", because of the wild and animal-like traits taken by the protagonists of the episodes here analysed. This form of lunacy often occurs in romance: Lancelot, Tristan and other warriors all experience this violent insanity in determinate circumstances. As soon as they lose their sanity, they run

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12 Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

13 Wendy J. Turner (ed.), *Madness in Medieval Law and Custom*, Leiden: Brill, 2010.

14 Neaman, "The Distracted Knight", p. 2.

to the wood, where they live like wild animals, until they are found and cured. Unlike the fool's idiocy, this madness is therefore finite in time, it can be cured and can affect also important members of the community. As will be analysed in this thesis, all these aspects generate interesting developments in the narration.

These episodes inevitably raise different questions. Are the characteristics of this madness simply due to a standard way of representing insanity or do they carry other messages? One might also wonder whether this lunacy constitutes a category of its own or is to be considered the extreme manifestation of other types of insanity, like, for instance, love-sickness. Another interesting issue is whether these figures of madmen were shaped after archetypal models of madness or wilderness and to what extent. Finally, readers might ask what effect these episodes were supposed to have on the audience of the time and how the mad protagonist was perceived.

In order to answer these questions, the best strategy is to reconstruct the possible point of view of a medieval reader, to try to climb into his or her skin and walk around in it. Once again, the method of analysis used in the studies mentioned above proves to be the most efficient. This dissertation will therefore take into account not only the literary and folkloric influences which might have acted on these episodes, but also the legal customs and medical theories of the time.

Although in medieval literature madness can have many different nuances, this does not mean that the medieval world did not have precise parameters to define a lunatic. In some contexts, as for example the legal one, the definition of "madman" is explicit and unequivocal. Going back once again to the example of Emma Beston, we learn that she was judged to be of unsound mind because she had "neither sense, nor memory, nor sufficient intelligence to manage herself, her lands, or her goods."[15] This definition can be perfectly applied for example to Lancelot and to other wild knights, as

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[15]   Roffe, p. 1708.

will be analysed in this thesis, but not to other figures like, for instance, Sir Orfeo. The latter retires in the forest and forsakes his former life after his wife has disappeared, but never loses his memory or sense or proves unable to manage his lands. On the contrary, before leaving he assigns to his steward the task of looking after his kingdom. Although in the present study Sir Orfeo will occasionally be taken into account because of his wild life, since he is not explicitly mad, he will not be included in the category of wild madmen.

As anticipated above, this study will focus not only on a distinctive manifestation of madness, but also on a specific genre: romance. The madmen[16] here analysed display common characteristics: they seek refuge in wild environments, alter their way of dressing and eating and generally manifest an extremely aggressive nature, thus creating comic situations, as happens in the fifteenth-century Picard romance *Ysaÿe le Triste* or in the thirteenth-century romance *Guiron le Courtois*. There are many examples of this wild insanity in medieval literature,[17] but the main characters taken into account will be four: Ywain, Lancelot, Tristan and Partonope.

The intriguing aspects of concentrating on these figures are many. First, they all belong to a specific context and can be therefore expected to be subject to the same rules, those of chivalry and courtly love. All these knights lose their mind after a sudden separation from their lovers; the situation leading to madness is therefore different from that of other lunatics. Margery Kempe, for example, suffered from a violent insanity but both the causes and the consequences of her madness have little to do with the lunacy of these knights.

The second reason is that their episodes of madness follow a common plot line:

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[16] So far, only one case has been found where the protagonist of a similar episode of madness is a woman. The *Story of Beritola*, from Boccaccio's *Decameron* will be used in this thesis as a useful parallel but will not here constitute an object of analysis.

[17] See Appendix 1, where the literary madmen encountered in this analysis are listed.

the protagonist loses his reason after a dramatic event, is missed by the members of his community and in the end is healed and brought back to his role. Besides, in these cases, the account of the protagonist's madness is extremely eventful: the knight interacts with other characters, and his family and friends generally set off to look for him. In other works where this wild madness is described, as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (twelfth century), or where a similar narrative structure can be found, as in the Irish poem *Serglige Con Culainn* (tenth-eleventh century), or even in the Anglo-Norman romance *Amadas et Ydoine* (twelfth-thirteenth century), the adventurous aspect of this madness is extremely reduced, when not absent. Insanity here therefore does not involve only the protagonist, as happens for instance in the case of Thomas Hoccleve in his *Complaint*, but also the other members of the community. The knight's dramatic social descent clearly implies more significant consequences than in episodes like that of Matto le Breune - a madman mentioned in the *Roman de Tristan* and in *Le Morte Darthur* - where the protagonist is probably not an important knight, since apparently nobody has ever tried to look for him after he went mad.

Besides, these protagonists are not only part of a community, but figures of excellence. On one hand, their new condition as madmen allows comic scenes otherwise impossible. On the other, the sudden alteration of the protagonist's life must have been perceived as deeply disturbing. It is not surprising if a sick monk goes mad after disobeying his abbot, as can be read in Étienne de Besançon's collection of *exempla An Alphabet of Tales*;[18] madness, as will be further investigated in this thesis, was often regarded as a divine punishment. Similarly, a frustrated lover and a wronged warrior who is overcome with a sort of battle frenzy while he seeks revenge, like Chaucer's Troilus, is nothing extraordinary. The most skilled knight and refined lover of the court

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[18] Mary Macleod Banks (ed.), *Étienne de Besançon - An Alphabet of Tales: an English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum of Étienne de Besançon, from Additional Ms 25719 of the British Museum*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1904, p. 452.

suddenly degraded to the state of wild animal, on the contrary, probably represented one of the most frightening realisations of the principle of *rota fortunae* and allowed more interesting developments.

In order to make this work more accessible to the reader, an English translation is provided for all the non-English passages here quoted. Wherever possible, I have tried to provide an authoritative translation, whose edition will be referred to in the footnotes. The passages which I personally translated will be marked as "translation mine".

List of Abbreviations and Bibliographical Notes

CL *Le Chevalier au Lion*; edition: William W. Kibler (ed.), *The Knight with the Lion, or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, New York, London: Garland, 1985.

CRT *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*; edition: Renee L. Curtis (ed.), *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, Tome III, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985.

DM *Vita Merlini*; *Buile Shuibhne*; edition: Philippe Walter et al. (eds.), *Le Devin Maudit: Merlin, Lailoken, Suibhne, Textes et Études*, Grenoble: ELLUG, 1999.

FL *La Folie Lancelot*; edition: Fanny Bogdanow (ed.), *La Folie Lancelot, a Hiterto Unidentified Portion of the Suite du Merlin*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen, 1965.

FT *Folie Tristan*; edition: Ian Short (ed.), *The Anglo-Norman Folie Tristan*, London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1993.

LB, *Layamon's Brut*; edition: W.R.J. Barron, S.C. Weinberg (eds.), *Layamon: Brut, or Hystoria Brutonum*, Harlow: Longman, 1995.

MDA *Le Morte Darthur*; edition: Eugene Vinaver (ed.), *The works of Thomas Malory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

MRT *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*; edition: Ménard, Philippe (ed.), *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose, Tome I: Des Aventures de Lancelot à la Fin de La "Folie Tristan"*, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1987.

PB *Partonope of Blois*, edition: A. Trampe Bödtker (ed.), *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, London: Oxford University Press, 1912.

PM *Prose Merlin*, edition: John Conlee (ed.), *Prose Merlin*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998.

RC Works by Geoffrey Chaucer, edition: Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

SG *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; edition: W. R. J. Barron (ed.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974.

SO *Sir Orfeo*, edition: A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

YG *Ywain and Gawain*, edition: Albert B. Friedman, Norman T. Harrington (eds.), *Ywain and Gawain*, London, New York, Toronto: Oxford university press, 1964.

YT *Ysaÿe le Triste*; edition: André Giacchetti (ed.), *Ysaÿe le Triste*, Rouen: Publications

de l'Université de Rouen, 1989.

The edition of the Bible used for this study is Alberto Colunga, Lorenzo Turrado (eds.), *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1959. For the English translations of the passages quoted, the reference edition is the New Revised Standard Version from *The Complete Parallel Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal-Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version, Revised English Bible, New American Bible, New Jerusalem Bible*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

List of Illustrations in Appendix

1. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms Fr. 13091, f.106r, known as Psautier de Jean de Berry; late 14th century.

2. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Ms 1-2005, f.77r, known as Macclesfield Psalter; 14th century.

3. London, British Library, Yates Thompson Ms 14, f. 57v, known as St Omer Psalter; 14th century.

4. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 366, f. 71v, known as Ormesby Psalter; 14th century.

5. Ormesby Psalter, f. 71v, detail.

6. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms Clm 935, f. 25v, known as Prayer book of Saint Hildegard; 12th century.

7. London, British Library, Royal Ms 10 E IV, f. 115v, known as the Smithfield Decretals; end of 13th-beginning of 14th century.

8. Smithfield Decretals, f. 116r.

9. Smithfield Decretals, f. 116v.

10. Smithfield Decretals, f. 117r.

11. Smithfield Decretals, f.117v.

12. Smithfield Decretals, f. 118r.

13. Smithfield Decretals, f. 118v.

14. London, British Library, Harley Ms 4380, f. 1r; between 1470 and 1472 .

15. Smithfield Decretals, f. 247r.

16. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 335, f. 226v; 15th century.

17. Smithfield Decretals, f. 72r.

18. Smithfield Decretals, f. 74v.

19. Smithfield Decretals, f. 101r.

1
The Corpus

As anticipated in the preface, this thesis will focus on a specific kind of madness but also on a specific genre: romance. Moreover, I decided to concentrate on the Middle English versions of these episodes, although I have consulted also other works in different languages. The main texts will consequently be *Ywain and Gawain* (fourteenth century), Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (fifteenth century) and *Partonope of Blois* (fifteenth century). All these works are adaptations of Old French texts, as will be later analysed; the translators did not apply dramatic changes in their adaptations of these episodes, even though the Middle English versions are generally shorter. The French originals will naturally be taken into account, as they are useful to investigate some of the aspects which to the modern readers might result more obscure, but the Middle English versions present other interesting aspects. The translators clearly planned them to be part of a finished work and these episodes can be therefore analysed within an established context. This is much more difficult in the case of the French originals, both because texts like *The Vulgate Cycle* seem more a collection of independent episodes than a uniform work, and because the great circulation of some of the texts makes any attempt at comparing the versions extremely difficult, as is the case for example of the *Roman de Tristan en Prose*. The first part of this work was edited by Reneé L. Curtis; he could not produce an edition of the entire romance because of the great number of extant manuscripts, thus the second part was edited through the collaboration of different teams coordinated by Philippe Ménard.[19]

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[19]   Tristan's madness is unfortunately split between the third volume of Curtis' edition and the first of Ménard's. Any abbreviated reference to the *Roman de Tristan en Prose* will therefore contain an

The other fascinating side of the Middle English versions paradoxically consists in the fact that they are more synthetic than the French, but despite this, the wild madness is still recognisable. In the process of adaptation, the translators selected those characteristics which the Middle English audience needed in order to identify this wild madness. This suggests that by the time the Middle English versions were composed, the wild madness of the knight had become more an established canon than an occasional *topos,* and that the details which have been deleted probably were not indispensable to identify this madness, at least for the English audience. This can be seen for example in the case of Ywain. In the French text, he is said to wander across fields and plains (lines 2811)[20] before ending up in the forest, while in the Middle English he goes directly to the wood (line 1651)[21]. For the Middle English translator, the important information was that Ywain had gone into a wild place; the fact that he roamed before reaching the forest probably had little relevance in the description of the protagonist's insanity.

Middle English writers could also afford to cut sections concerning other characters and to focus on the madman. In the case of Tristan, for example, the protagonist is brought back to Tintagel while still mad by orders of King Mark. In the French text, the meeting between the madman and his uncle, who does not recognise him at first, is slightly comic. Tristan is sleeping but Mark suddenly blows his horn and he awakes; the madman knocks out some shepherds with his club but the king's men arrive before he can attack the petrified Mark. When the other knights arrive, Tristan is brought to court without being punished for his aggressiveness.[22] Malory simply states

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indication of the editor rather than of the volume.

[20] William W. Kibler (ed.), *Chrétien de Troyes, The Knight with the Lion (Le Chevalier au Lion)*, New York, London: Garland, 1985, p. 114. Henceforth referred to as "CL"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

[21] Albert B. Friedman, Norman T. Harrington (eds.), *Ywain and Gawain*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 45. Henceforth referred to as "YG"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

[22] Philippe Ménard (ed.), *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose, Tome I: Des Aventures de Lancelot à la Fin de La "Folie Tristan"*, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1987 pp. 273-275. Henceforth referred to as "MRT"; page

that Mark goes in the forest to find the madman and that as soon as he finds him he summons the other members of the search party and orders them to treat the madman gently.[23] At this point of the book, he does not need to portray Mark as a coward, since his character has already been defined in the first part of the book, but he clearly believes that the fact that the madman is not responsible for his actions, and therefore should not be punished, is an aspect worth speaking of. When wondering what traits and themes were perceived by the medieval readers as distinctive of these episodes, one will find that the Middle English translators have already provided an answer. In this chapter, the episodes and the texts of the corpus will be contextualised.

1.1 Ywain and Gawain

Ywain and Gawain is a fourteenth-century adaptation of the Old French romance *Yvain, ou Le Chevalier au Lion* by Chrétien de Troyes. Only one copy of the Middle English text survives and is contained in the manuscript Cotton Galba E. ix, preserved in the British Library.[24] The French original is one of the few cases where the author of the romance is known and although a precise dating is not possible, it seems that the period of composition must be the same as *Le Chevalier à la Charrette* (CL xiii-xvii), that is to say around 1177.[25] Nothing is known about the translator but Friedman suggests that he might have composed this adaptation after 1325 and probably based his work directly on one of the manuscripts of Chrétien's work, as the plot develops in an almost identical way and many descriptive passages show striking similarities (YG xvi; lviii). The Middle English translator intervened in some places of the poem and simplified it, presumably in order to adapt it to a less refined audience than Chrétien's. *Ywain and*

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numbers will be inserted in the text.
[23] Eugene Vinaver, *The Works of Thomas Malory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 373. Henceforth referred to as "MDA"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.
[24] Mary Flowers Braswell, *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995, p. 77.
[25] Philippe Ménard, *De Chrétien de Troyes au* Tristan en Prose*: Études sur les Romans de la Table Ronde*, Genève: Droz, 1999, pp. 9-13.

Gawain is therefore considerably shorter than its French original. Friedman claims that the translator must have been a northern minstrel concerned more with the adventurous development of the action than with descriptions and reflections about courtly love; he thus transformed Chrétien's "elegant and dilatory court romance in a rapid paced story of love and gallant adventure" (YG xvi).

During a banquet at King Arthur's court, sir Colgrevance relates his unsuccessful attempt at conquering a magic fountain. His young cousin Ywain decides to avenge the family honour and sets off secretly in order to arrive before the king and the other members of the court, who, like him, want to try and succeed where Colgrevance has failed. He kills the knight who guards the fountain, but he falls in love with his widow Alundyne. With the help of her lady-in-waiting, Lunette, he manages to obtain the lady's love and her hand in marriage. Some time later, King Arthur visits the new couple with his court and, when they leave, Gawain convinces Ywain to join them. Alundyne complies with her husband's request to leave, but makes him promise to be back within one year. Ywain forgets his oath and one day a lady arrives on the part of Alundyne to inform him that his wife has repudiated him. Ywain goes mad and wanders in the wood. When he meets an archer, he steals his bow and arrows and uses them to hunt for food. He is seen by a hermit, who is initially terrified, but later takes pity on him. The holy man leaves bread and boiled meat for the madman, and Ywain in exchange brings him all the venison he manages to get. One day, a lady and her maids recognise him while sleeping under a tree and decide to heal him with a magic oil. He then engages in a series of quests and adventures to regain his lost honour; he saves a lion from a dragon and the animal then becomes his companion. Ywain is thus known with the sobriquet of "the knight with the lion" and does not reveal his identity until he finds himself fighting against his best friend Gawain. In the end, Lunette helps him once again and he is

reconciled with Alundyne.

In both French and Middle English texts, the episode of madness has a central position in the plot. Ywain's lunacy goes from line 2808 to line 3023 in the French version (CL 114-122) and from line 1649 to line 1789 in the English translation (YG 45-48). The English translator has curtailed the episode so that it is 75 lines shorter; however, there is no significant alteration in the plot of the episode. Only the encounter between Ywain and the archer is slightly altered; while in the original text Ywain is simply said to approach a young boy and steal his bow and arrows, in the English text, he explicitly and violently attacks a more generic "man" (YG 45; line 1658). The translator might have preferred to underline the aggressiveness of the madman without attributing to the hero of the story such an unworthy action as attacking a boy. The additional violent traits given to this episode could be aimed at satisfying a different typology of audience, probably less refined than Chrétien's, and maybe more fascinated by violent or sensational details. This seems confirmed by the innovative detail of Ywain's drinking the blood of animals, absent in the original French text (YG 45; lines 1669-1670). The translator might have wanted his Ywain to meet a standard of wild madness which by the time had been established and which implied aggressiveness as one of the main features of the madman, as can be seen for instance in the case of Tristan or of Lancelot.

1.2 Malory's Le Morte Darthur

Both Tristan's and Lancelot's episodes are contained in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory apparently wrote his book while in prison, and finished it in March 1469 (MDA vi-vii); Caxton published it in 1485, but a manuscript copy of the work[26] found in Winchester College in 1934 shows that the publisher made some alterations (MDA vii).

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[26] London, British Library, Additional Ms 59678, known as *The Winchester Manuscript*.

In Caxton's edition, the sequence of the sections is different from the Winchester manuscript but the publisher seems to have also expurgated many of the author's references to his condition as a prisoner; in addition, Caxton probably "translated" the original work into his own Kentish dialect.[27] The differences between the Winchester manuscript and the printed edition demonstrate that Caxton's version does not entirely correspond to what Malory originally wrote, but, so far, critics still disagree on the extent of Caxton's interventions.[28] In the episodes of Lancelot's and Tristan's madness, there are no significant discrepancies between the Winchester manuscript and Caxton's version; therefore, in this analysis, the author of the *Morte Darthur* will be conventionally referred to as Malory, and the edition used will be Eugene Vinaver's *The Work of Thomas Malory*, based principally on the Winchester manuscript and integrated, where necessary, with Caxton's version.

This work represents the longest collection of Arthurian episodes in English, and was probably based on many different sources. The alliterative *Morte Arthur* is likely to be the source for *The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*, and the stanzaic *Morte d'Arthur*, together with a French version of this romance,[29] served as a source for his last and most famous section, *The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthure*. For the other parts he probably used French romances like the *Suite du Merlin*, or the *Roman de Tristan en Prose* and the *Prose Lancelot* (MDA, vii-viii).

The episodes of wild madness are both contained in *The Book of Sir Tristam de Lyones*, which in Vinaver's edition is placed between *The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkeney* and *The Tale of the Sankreal*. This section interlaces the adventures not only of Tristan and Isolde but also of many other characters, but when looking at Tristan's and

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[27] P. J. Field, *The Life and Times of Thomas Malory*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993, pp. 2-3.
[28] Bonnie G. Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, Michael Norman Salda (eds.), *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte Darthur*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000, pp. xv-xxxii.
[29] Robert H. Wilson, "Malory's 'French Book' Again", *Comparative Literature*, 2, 1950, pp. 172-181, p. 177.

Lancelot's evolution throughout the book, it appears evident that the experience of madness has a central position in Lancelot's and Tristan's story. Although in terms of length they might not seem episodes of particular significance, their position in the work, together with their representing the lowest point in the knight's career, make them extremely important both for the protagonist and for the other characters, as they reconcile the presentation of the protagonist both as a nobleman and as a self-made man. In the adventures before madness, the hero is generally depicted as someone entitled by right of birth to all the noblest qualities. This vision naturally does not disappear after the experience of madness, but it becomes clear that the protagonist must re-affirm his honour with his own individual strength and valour.

For the story of Tristan, Malory probably used the *Roman de Tristan en Prose*. Lancelot's case is more complex. The episode is contained both in Vulgate-Cycle *Prose Lancelot* and in the *Roman de Tristan en Prose*. With all probability, the episode constitutes a late addition to the *Roman de Tristan*, and, in most manuscripts, it does not present dramatic differences with the *Vulgate* version. Fanny Bogdanow brings forward the hypothesis that the episode might have constituted also the final part of the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, which now can be read only in an incomplete version.[30]

As mentioned above, Malory probably used all these works; moreover, most editions of the French versions seem more or less equivalent in terms of variants between them and Malory's text. Fanny Bogdanow based her edition of this episode on two manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: the fifteenth century Ms fr. 112, where the episode is inserted in the *Prose Lancelot*, and the late thirteenth century Ms 12599, containing the *Prose Tristan*. Since the main source for the whole *Book of Sir Tristan* was the *Roman de Tristan en Prose*, it is very likely that

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[30] Fanny Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail: A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Prose Romance*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966, p. 64.

Lancelot's episode was based on a text similar to Ms fr. 12599, but it cannot be excluded that he consulted also the other works. Although other texts have been consulted, in this thesis the reference edition for the French version of Lancelot's episode will be Bogdanow's *La Folie Lancelot*;[31] this edition is not necessarily the best or the closest to Malory's version, but it is the only one which presents all the passages quoted in this analysis in the text rather than in the variants.

1.2.1 Tristan

After sailing to Brittany, and marrying Isolde le Blaunche Maynys, Tristan secretly goes back to Tintagel together with his brother-in-law and best friend Kahedin. Isolde welcomes them and keeps them hidden in a tower. As soon as he sees the queen, Kahedin falls in love with her and, aware of standing no chance against Tristan, becomes love-sick and nearly consumes himself to death. Isolde feels pity for the knight and knows that, should he die, Tristan would be grieved. She thus writes a letter of consolation to Kahedin, who recovers. Unfortunately, Tristan finds the letter and believes the two have an affair. After confronting first Kahedin and then Isolde, he flees from the castle without allowing them to explain the misunderstanding. He reaches the forest, where he meets sir Fergus and asks him to bring a farewell message to his queen; meanwhile Palamedes sends a young lady to look for his rival. When the maid finds Tristan, she attempts to cure him of his melancholic state, but the knight soon escapes from her. He then reaches the castle where he once fought with sir Palamedes. The lady from the castle tries to feed him and brings him a harp, but after a while Tristan is seized by wild madness and runs away. He is found by a group of herdsmen who shave his

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[31] Fanny Bogdanow (ed.), *La Folie Lancelot, a Hiterto Unidentified Portion of the Suite du Merlin, Contained in Mss. B.N. fr. 112 and 12599*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen 1965. The episode is here presented as a possible missing part from the *Suite du Merlin*, but discussing the validity of Bogdanow's theory is not among the aims of this dissertation. Henceforth referred to as "FL"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

head and treat him like a fool. One day, Dagonet meets the group of shepherds and attacks them. Tristan runs to defend them and beats the knight. Dagonet then tells Mark what has happened and the king believes he must have met Matto Le Breune, a knight who had gone mad after losing his lover. After Tristan kills the giant Tauleas, Mark decides that the madman must be kept under control and has him brought to court. There Tristan is bathed, dressed and well fed and thus recovers his sanity. He does not make himself known at court, until his dog recognises him, and he reconciles with Isolde. These events are alternated with the narration of what happens to the other characters. After losing Tristan, Palamedes' maid goes back to the court and tells her master what has happened; Palamedes and Kahedin decide to set off to look for the mad knight. At Tintagel, sir Andred spreads the rumour that Tristan is dead in order to obtain his lands, thus causing the despair of the king and of Isolde, who tries to kill herself.

As already anticipated, in the story of Tristan's madness, another wild madman is mentioned: Matto le Breune. Sir Matto had lost his lady in a duel with Sir Gaheris, and, as a consequence, had gone out of his mind. This character is present only in Malory (MDA 371) and in the *Roman de Tristan* (MRT 255-257), where his story is told only briefly, but the fact that Mark after hearing the description of mad Tristan mistakes him for Matto suggests that this knight was believed to suffer from a similar wild insanity. The episode therefore represents a *mise-en-abyme* of the story of Tristan.

Although this is the only occasion on which he loses his mind, there is another episode where Tristan is associated with madness. In the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poem *Folie Tristan*, the protagonist returns to Tintagel disguised as a madman. He is welcomed by the king, who takes his attempts to make himself known to Isolde as the amusing fantasies of a fool. In the end, he manages to prove his identity to the queen and the two lovers are reunited. The plot of these two episodes is different but it has

been hypothesised[32] that one might have inspired the other, even though it is impossible to establish which text was written first. Apart from the presence of the theme of madness, in both cases, Tristan is in Tintagel *incognito*, and on both occasions he is able to approach the queen because of his madness.

1.2.2 Lancelot

Although the episode of Lancelot's madness is independent in terms of narrative, it is strongly linked to the episode of the conception of Galahad, which is briefly recalled both in Malory and in the French versions, in order to explain the relationship between Lancelot and Elaine. During one of his adventures, Lancelot ends up in King Pelles' palace. The wise king knows that from the union of Lancelot and of his daughter Elaine the purest knight of the world will be generated, and therefore accepts the help of his daughter's lady in waiting, dame Brusen, in order to have his guest sleep with the princess. Brusen tells Lancelot that queen Guinevere is waiting for him in a castle not far away. When he arrives, he is given some wine, probably drugged, and he does not realise that the woman in his bed is not Guinevere but Elaine. When daylight comes, he understands he has been deceived and decides to kill the princess. The latter asks for mercy and he forgives her; the two part as friends and in due time Galahad is born (MDA 583-586).

The story of Lancelot's madness begins with a feast at king Arthur's court. Elaine arrives but Lancelot feels ashamed for his violent reaction during the last encounter with the lady and does not dare speak to her. Elaine feels extremely grieved for this, for she is in love with the knight, and once again Brusen offers her help. She tells Lancelot that

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[32]   Renée L. Curtis, "Tristan 'Forsené': the Episode of the Hero's Madness in the 'Prose Tristan'", Adams, Alison et al. (eds.), *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford: a Tribute by the Members of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986, pp. 10-22.

the queen has sent her to guide him to her chamber and leads him to Elaine's. Lancelot talks in his sleep and Guinevere hears him, thus realising she has been betrayed. She then faces her lover and says she does not wish to see him any more. Lancelot passes out and when he recovers he is completely out of his mind. He launches himself out of the window and flees into the wood. There he lives like a wild animal until one day he runs into sir Blyaunte's pavilion. He attacks his dwarf page, knocks out the knight and then falls asleep. When sir Blyaynte recovers, he decides to transport the madman to his castle to have him cured; Lancelot thus recovers his strength and his beauty but not his reason. One day, he sees sir Blyaunte being attacked by two knights and saves him. The lord then decides to free the madman from the chain used to keep him under control. Being now free to move, Lancelot soon escapes; he follows a wild boar and is wounded. A hermit cures his injury, but cannot feed him properly and he becomes madder than ever. He soon resumes his wandering and arrives into the city of Corbyn, where king Pelles lives. He is chased by street boys and seeks refuge in the castle, where he is welcomed as court fool. One day Elaine sees him asleep in the garden and recognises him. She informs her father of the real identity of the court clown and the latter has Lancelot cured with the Holy Grail. After recovering his reason, Lancelot feels too ashamed to face the world, so king Pelles offers him the use of a castle, where the knight goes to live with Elaine and Galahad. There he is found by Percival and Ector, who convince him to go back to Camelot, where he is warmly welcomed back.

As happens in the episode of Tristan, the madman's adventures alternate with those of the people he left behind. Bors, Sir Ector and sir Lionel set off to find Lancelot; and are subsequently joined by sir Gawain, sir Uwain, sir Sagramore le Desirous, sir Aglovale, and sir Percival, and other knights (MDA 596-597). The group is soon divided and Percival and Aglovale pay a visit to their mother, who begs them to

remain at home with her to take the place of their late father and of the other two brothers who had been killed. They refuse, claiming that their chivalric vocation compels them to wander and seek adventures. After their departure, their mother sends a squire after them in a last attempt to call her sons back, but they quickly dismiss the young servant. On the way back home, the squire stops in a castle and introduces himself as a servant to Aglovale. Hearing this, Sir Goodwyne, the owner of the castle, has the squire killed to take revenge on sir Aglovale who had killed his brother. The following day, Percival and Aglovale arrive at the castle and see the corpse of the servant; Aglovale then challenges sir Goodwyne and defeats him, while Percival fights all the other men in the castle (MDA 597-600). After some time, Percival decides to continue the search on his own and leaves while his brother is asleep. He frees sir Parsydes, who had been captured by "an uncurteyse lady" and tied to a pillar of stone, and he sends the grateful knight back to Camelot to announce to the others that he will not be back until he has found Lancelot and proved his valour, in spite of Kay's and Mordred's scorn of him. When the message is reported at court, we are told of the different reactions. Aglovale laments the manner in which his brother has left him; Kay and Mordred express their doubts about Percival's possibilities of achieving any honour and Arthur ambiguously concludes that "he muste nedys preve a good knyght, for hys fadir and hys bretherne were noble knyghtes all" (MDA 600-602). The narration then goes back to Percival, who meets sir Ector and jousts with him. The fight is interrupted as soon as the knights learn of each other's identity but they realise they are both too weak to look for help and that they are about to die because of their wounds; Percival then prays and a mysterious maiden carrying the Holy Grail appears; the two men are then miraculously healed (MDA 602-604). The only other questers mentioned before the end of the story are Bors and Lionel, who reach the castle of king Brandegorys,

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where Bors meets his son Elyan and decides to take him to Camelot (MDA 615).

Unlike the other mad knights, Lancelot experiences madness on other occasions as well. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier à la Charrette*, he falls into a state of ecstatic day-dream while thinking of Guinevere. During this reverie, he forgets his name, where he comes from and where he is going.[33] In the *Prose Lancelot* section of the *Vulgate Cycle*, he goes out of his mind twice, apart from the episode with Elaine. During the war between Arthur and the Saxons, he is captured by Gamille and after some days of confinement, he goes completely insane. He is then released and reaches Arthur's camp and Guinevere's tent. The queen recognises him and attempts to heal him, but without success. In the end, the Lady of the Lake cures the knight with a magic shield. On another occasion, he goes mad with grief because he cannot find Galehot. He wanders in the wilderness until he is found once again by the Lady of the Lake and restored to sanity.[34]

None of these episodes is maintained in Malory, but their main themes are assembled in the story of Lancelot's madness contained in the *Morte d'Arthur*. The protagonist suffers from amnesia, as in the *Chevalier à la Charrette*, and wanders through wild places, as in the third *Prose Lancelot* episode of madness. Besides, as in the second and third episodes, madness is connected with sorrow and jealousy, even though in this case jealousy is associated with Guinevere and not with the protagonist. Finally, the madman is healed with magic, as happens in the other *Prose Lancelot* episodes. Since the episode with Elaine is present both in the *Prose Lancelot* and in the *Roman de Tristan*, it probably was the most famous of Lancelot's *folies*. It is therefore likely that Malory did not find it necessary to integrate the other episodes in his book,

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[33] Pietro G. Beltrami (ed.), *Chrétien de Troyes-Godefroi de Leigni, Il Cavaliere della carretta (Lancillotto)*, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004, p. 76.

[34] H. Oskar Sommer (ed.), *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1909, Vol. 3, p. 412-419; Vol. 4, p. 154-155.

and maintained only the longest and most complex *folie,* and the only one inserted in an interlaced narrative structure. Moreover, since the theme of madness is present also in the story of Tristan, other episodes of insanity would have probably been redundant.

These preliminary observations bring forward two of the issues which will be the object of this investigation. The first is the importance of the impact of madness on the other members of the community rather than on the madman himself. The second interesting aspect is that Malory decided to maintain two similar episodes of madness in his work, even though they concern different characters. He could have easily eliminated one of them without apparently affecting the overall structure of the work. The fact that he maintained both Tristan's and Lancelot's madness suggests that he probably considered it a significant step in the presentation of these characters. Whether it was because madness could be regarded as a divine punishment, or because it represented a moral lesson for those who witness it or for the audience, or simply because it provided comic elements will be analysed in the following chapters.

1.3 Partonope de Blois

Partonope de Blois is a Middle English translation of the twelfth-century French romance *Partonopaeus de Blois*.[35] Unfortunately, nothing is known about the authors of the French and Middle English works. The text is extant in two versions, both probably composed in the first half of the fifteenth century.[36] One of them is fragmentary, but the other is sufficiently close to the extant French versions to assume that the translator was actually working directly from a French book. The longer Middle English version survives in five manuscripts: Oxford, Univ. Coll. Oxford, Ms C. 188 (about 1450) was

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[35]   For further information about the French romance see Penny Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois, Romance in the Making*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011.

[36]   A. Trampe Bödtker (ed.), *The Middle English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, London: Oxford University Press, 1912, pp. vi-viii. Henceforth referred to as "PB"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

the main source for the first printed edition of the text made by W. E. Buckley in 1862; Ms Rawl. Poet. 14 (second half of the fifteenth century) is preserved at the Bodleian Library, like Ms Eng. Poet. C. 3, ff. 6-7 (fifteenth-century); finally, some fragments of the romance are contained in Lord Robartes's Ms (fifteenth-century), belonging to Viscount Clifden and a longer portion in Add. Ms 35.288 (late fifteenth century) preserved at the British Library. The shorter version is extant only in a Ms at Vale Royal[37] written about 1450 (PB vi-viii).

Partonope is the young and handsome nephew of the king of France; during a hunt, he gets lost in the forest and finds a magic ship which brings him to an enchanted castle. There he eats a dinner prepared by invisible servants and then goes to bed. During the night, a lady enters his bed. After the initial hostility, the lady, whose name is Melior, proposes to Partonope to become his mistress for two years and a half, on condition that he never attempts to see her. After this period, she will marry him and he will become the king of her lands and possessions. The boy accepts, but, during a visit back home, he is persuaded by his mother and by a bishop to try to see this mysterious mistress and thus breaks the pact with Melior. The lady repudiates him, and Partonope falls into a state of despair to the point that he decides to go to the forest of the Ardennes hoping that some wild beast will devour him. There he is found by Melior's sister Urake, who at first does not recognise him because of his wild aspect. She decides to help him regain his lady's favour and brings him back to health. She then provides him with horse and armour to take part to the tournament for Melior's hand, and in the meantime she convinces Melior that Partonope has gone mad and is now lost in the wood and that she has been unjustly strict towards her lover. In the end, Partonope wins the tournament and is reconciled with Melior.

Partonope represents a particular case of wild madness. He does not seem to lose

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[37] Unfortunately further information about Lord Robartes's Ms and Vale Royal Ms is unavailable.

his mind like Lancelot and the others, even though his leaving his castle of Blois without an appointed steward and going in the Ardennes to have himself devoured by some wild beast could hardly be perceived as wise by the medieval audience.[38] Besides, he shares some of the characteristics of the others wild knights, such as the wild environment, the poor diet and the animal-like aspect. Moreover, when Urake describes Partonope's alleged madness, she mentions details, such as the lack of food and wild life (PB 314-317, lines 7841-7845; 7909-7911), actually occurring in the protagonist's experience in the forest, and she seems to have in mind the same wild insanity of Lancelot and the others. Even though the protagonist never loses his mind, this wild madness is present in the romance.

The main texts taken into account in this analysis therefore cover nearly a century and a half in British history, from about 1325 to 1469. Many were the events which certainly affected British culture in this chronological span, from the Black Death (1348-1350), to the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), to the War of the Roses (1455-1485). It is possible that these episodes of madness were affected by these and other political events of the time, but authors might also have been influenced by other factors, such as, for instance, medical theories and by superstition, as will be explored in this dissertation.

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[38] A similar ambiguity about the knight's sanity can be found also in the fifteenth-century *Le Dit du Prunier*; here the protagonist is initially wild and unrefined, but as soon as he falls in love with a lady he decides to become a better man. The lady however rejects him and declares that he should give up any hope to conquer her. The knight then is apparently overcome with wild madness, but he never loses his memory or ability to speak. It is therefore not clear whether he is actually in a state of wild madness or simply returned to his initial wild condition.

2
Symptoms of Wild Madness

As mentioned in the first chapter, Lancelot's madness in the wood is not the only episode where the Arthurian hero displays signs of insanity. The madness he experiences in the episode with Elaine, however, is characterised by very precise elements, which do not occur in his other *folies*, and which can be found also in the descriptions of the other mad knights. Apart from being attracted by wild environments, these knights wander nearly undressed, present an aggressive nature towards all the human beings they meet, obey only their instincts and follow a diet which we infer is very different from the one they were used to, as it consists mainly of roots and berries. Most of these details represent basic anthropological elements in the definition of one's social condition but might also imply other messages and cultural influences, as will be here analysed.

2.1 The wild setting

In *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, Corinne Saunders analyses the implications of the wild environment in medieval literature. She explores how the forest constitutes an archetypal presence in romance; the wood can represent, for instance, the setting for the chivalric adventure, but also the place where social conventions cease to exist, as can be seen in the case of the Forest of Morois, in which Tristan and Iseuld seek refuge. Besides, she demonstrates how "the role of the forest extends far beyond its obvious association with darkness and danger, incorporating the themes of adventure, love, and

spiritual vision".[39]

Even though the concept of forest certainly implied all these aspects, for the medieval man the wood often represented above all something wild, dangerous and opposed to civilisation. The medieval audience therefore probably saw the forest as a place of exile – which could be both positive, as in the case of the hermit, or negative, when imposed as a punishment for one's sins or defeat – haunted by all sorts of wild beings and monsters. This can be seen, for instance, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the wood is described mainly through the horrors it contains.

> Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayez straunge,
> Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.
> At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wyȝe passed
> He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
> And þat so foule and so felle þat feȝt hym byhode.
> So mony meruayl bi mount þer þe mon fyndez,
> Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.
> Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werrez, and with wolues als,
> Sumwhyle wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarrez,
> Boþe wyth bullez and berez, and borez oþerquyle,
> And etaynez, þat hym anelede of þe heȝe felle (lines 713-723)[40]

In these episodes, this wild setting therefore seems first of all the most immediate way of characterising Lancelot and the other knights, who are not simply mad but also wild and uncivilised, since they leave civilisation to dwell in a wild environment haunted by monsters and dangerous animals.

In the Old French *Folie Lancelot*, the separation between the civilised castle and the forest is underlined also by Lancelot's looking back to Camelot before going completely insane.

> Et quant il fu fors de Camaalot et il comença a regarder la cité et il li souvint des granz joies et del grant bien qu'il i avoit eu par tantes foiz, et or estoit a ce menez que celle qu'il amoit plus que soi meemes s'estoit del tout a lui corrocié en tiel maniere qu'il n'en cuidoit james recouvrer. (FL 21)

> And when he arrived outside Camelot and began to behold the city, he was reminded of the

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[39] Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 1993, p. ix.
[40] W. R. J. Barron (ed.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974, p. 64. Henceforth referred to as "SG"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

great happiness and of the goodness he had experienced there on many occasions, and [realised that] now he was on that mountain and the one whom he loved more than himself was so enraged with him that he would never be able to recover her love. (translation mine)

The forest here represents what is alien to home, to the hero's affections and to the values of civilisation; the dramatic element in these episodes seems to be more the separation from civilisation, and the apparent impossibility of returning into it, than the actual fact of being in the wood. Something similar can be seen in the Middle English lay *Sir Orfeo*. When Orfeo retires in the wood after the disappearance of his wife, the narrator compares the former condition of the protagonist – a powerful king who enjoyed all the privileges of his position – to his present wild state (lines 239-266).[41] Interestingly, this complaint for what has been left behind seems to recur only on particular occasions. We never find it when the knight sets off for an honourable quest; in those cases, the focus is entirely on the accomplishment of the mission and on the honour deriving from it, or on the shame in case of defeat. In these cases, the forest's connotation becomes nearly positive: the more obstacles the setting presents, the more memorable the adventures of the knight will result. An explicit comparison between the comforts of the court and the hardships of the forest can be found when the hero leaves his home out of sorrow, as happens to the already mentioned Sir Orfeo, or when there seems to be no hope for a positive outcome of his quest. This can be seen for example, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the narrator points out that the hero is exposed to many hardships and to loneliness and that "he fonde noȝt hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked" (SG 64; lines 693-694). Gawain's quest is not a happy one and everybody fears that it will end with the death of the hero. In the case of these wild knights, the separation from the civilised world has nothing of the fascination of the adventurous journey, but it rather gives the narrator the occasion of reinforcing the sense of tragedy

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[41] Bliss, A. J. (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 22-24. Henceforth referred to as "SO"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

for their absence in the places where they should belong.

The exile from civilisation can have both a positive and negative valence. In *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, Penelope Doob distinguishes between holy and unholy wild men.[42] In the first case, the retirement in the forest is voluntary and aimed to a spiritual elevation obtained through the ascetic renunciation to worldly goods. It is evident that Lancelot's and the other heroes' self-exile in the wood is different from the hermit's religious retirement, as will be analysed in Chapter 6. The forest therefore, does not act for them as the setting of physical and moral trials in order to reinforce their spirituality. On the contrary, all these knights are healed only when they leave it. Tristan recovers his sanity when properly looked after, Lancelot is healed at King Pelles' court, and Ywain after he is rubbed with the magic oil by a maid from a nearby castle (MDA 373; 610; YG 48; lines 1779-1796). In the case of the wild knight, the wood definitely has a negative connotation.

The association between madness and marginalization was certainly not new to the medieval audience, since the topic has many biblical precedents. Apart from the story of King Nebuchadnezzar, which will be analysed in the Chapter 6, there are other references to madmen or possessed being sent in the wood: Jerome notes that "once men have lost their reason, who would not perceive them to lead their existence like brutish animals in the open fields and forest regions?";[43] Luke (8:29) tells of a man possessed by devils who is driven out to the desert ("et ruptis vinculis agebantur a daemonio in deserta"). Nevertheless, the forest described here seems quite different from the biblical wild places, which, as Corinne Saunders notes,[44] are characterised by phrases like *in solitudine* and *ex hominibus*. These wild knights seem to meet more

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[42] Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, p.139.

[43] Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958, p. 513.

[44] Saunders, p. 10.

human visitors than wild animals. Apart from the hermit, Ywain meets the man from whom he steals bow and arrow, and the lady with the two damsels (YG 45-48; lines 1657-1789). Tristan encounters Palamedes' maidservant, the lady of the castle, herdsmen and shepherds, Sir Dagonet, a hermit, sir Dynaunte, and Tauleas the giant attacking a knight before being captured by king Mark and his court (MDA 368-373). Similarly, Lancelot meets first sir Blyaunte, his wife, his dwarf and the hermit (MDA 604-608). The forest here seems far too crowded a place to be a proper site for retirement and self-discovery. Naturally, the narrative aspect must be taken into account: considering that these madmen do not seem to have a particularly complex personality, a sequence where they interact with other characters is far more interesting than a description of their solitude. This is probably also one of the reasons why, even though the forest is the main setting for the hero's madness, it is not the only one. The hero's frenzy has its cause and beginning at court, and in the forest its realisation. In the case of Partonope, his depression and wild behaviour begins while he is still in his castle (PB 256-257; lines 6643-6672). Similarly, Lancelot and the other knights are generally healed in a civilised context, not in the forest. Even though this is not unexpected, since it is natural to think that the return to a civilised mind could happen only in a civilised environment, it helps to understand that the wild setting covers only a part of the hero's madness, especially when considering that both Lancelot and Tristan are reintroduced in society, even if with the marginal role of fools, long before recovering their sanity. Moreover, a good portion of Lancelot's madness is set in Sir Blyaunte's castle and King Pelles' court (MDA 606-610).

Despite their many meetings in the forest, the mad knights always remain part of the wild element, and they seem more apt to be affected by the natural element than to exploit it. They do not triumph over the dangers contained in the forest, like the

traditional knights on a quest; on the contrary, they seem to attack all outsiders; moreover, they are unable, as will be later analysed, to provide themselves with proper food, despite the abundance of venison present in the wood. Similarly, they are not properly dressed and are therefore subject to the natural elements. Finally, unlike sir Orfeo and Merlin, they do not tame animals, but they behave like them. It is therefore not the setting where they live, but their attitude towards it that determines their characterisation as wild madmen. Ywain for example spends long periods in the forest also after being healed, but his approach towards the wood and its inhabitants is different. While during his madness he shoots any "wilde beste" (YG 45; lines 1664) he sees, when he meets the lion fighting with the dragon he decides to kill the dragon in order to help the lion. He thus subjects his ability to kill to a cultural and moral code where the lion, despite his being "wilde" (YG 53; line 1982), is a more positive animal than the dragon. While during his madness, Ywain is on the same level as the animals he kills, because he is hunting merely for food, in the episode with the dragon he is placed on a superior level because he is able to decide which animal should be killed according to rules which have little to do with his actual welfare.

The idea of leaving a positive place for a miserable one can be seen also in the vocabulary used to describe the knights' moving into the forest. The verbs used suggest the action of escaping and running away from a determined point; it is therefore the idea of leaving a place that is emphasised rather than that of a movement towards a specific target, as can be seen for instance in the case of Tristan.

> [Tristan] **rode forth oute of** the castell opynly that was callyd the Castell of Tyntagyll […] And so sir Trystramys rode hys way into the foreyste […] and at laste sir Trystram toke hys horse and **rode away from** her. […] And than another tyme Sir Trystramys **ascaped away frome** the damesell […] at the laste he **ran hys way**. (MDA 368-369)

The point of view seems to shift from Tristan to the element from which he escapes: it is from the castle of Tintagel that we see Tristan run into the wood, and it is through the

maid's eyes that we can imagine him escaping towards the forest. The vocabulary here seems to imply not only a voluntary movement towards the forest, but a frightened escape on the part of the mad knight from any civilised element. Tristan repeatedly tries to run away from the maid who wants to heal him; Lancelot, in Malory's version, performs an even more dramatic exit than in the Old French original, by launching himself through a window into the garden (MDA 594). He then literally runs away from any environment where he is looked after. It is as if in his wild frenzy the knight felt himself too unfit for civilisation. The wood, the place where civilisation ceases to exist, on the other hand, represents a more congenial environment for the wild knight, just as it would be for a wild animal. The mad knight, at least in his own eyes, is clearly assimilated to a wild beast which needs to return to the natural element as soon as possible. One final consideration about vocabulary needs to be made; the authors might be using terms which bring along the idea of running away without a precise target to evoke the mental confusion of the madman. Madness is often described in terms of not knowing what to do or where to go; in the *Folie Lancelot* for example, when the protagonist goes out of his mind, the narrator says that he did not know what he was doing, where he was going, or what he was saying (FL 21). In Malory, this sentence seems summarised by "he ranne furth he knew nat wothir" (MDA 594). The frequent use of verbs like "run away" or "run his way" might convey the same sense of disorientation that the madman is experiencing.

These, however, are not the only implications of the wild setting. The lunatic's escape is often followed by expeditions to look for him: Tristan is looked for by a servant maid sent by Palamedes and then by Palamedes himself and Sir Kahedin (MDA 368; 370). In the case of Lancelot, an actual rescue team is organised: Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Lionel, Sir Gawain, Sir Uwain, Sir Sagramore, Sir Aglovale, Sir Percival and

"eyghtene knyghtes" all set off to find the mad knight (MDA 596-597). The forest for them becomes the traditional setting of the standard honourable quest mentioned above, and allows them to experience many adventures while looking for their mad friends. The wild environment thus has different implications according to the focus of the narration: a challenge for the rescuer, a place of self-exile for the mad knight.

Moreover, there often seems to be a strict connection between the setting of the wood and the episodes of mourning after losing in battle. This can be seen in the myth of Merlin: in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, the hero flees to the wood after the death of his brothers in battle; similarly in the myth of Suibhne, the hero retires in the wood after defeat in battle.[45] In addition, in Layamon's *Brut*, after the Picts are beaten in battle, some of the soldiers run for shelter in the wood where they retire to mourn. The wood is here opposed to the site of open and honourable battle and therefore becomes the place of defeat and dishonour.

> þa þe þeo Peohtes weoren ouercumme i þon fehte, and Rodric was dæd and his iueren fordemed, þa fluʒen þer bihælues fiftene hundred Þat weoren Þfeirest men Þe weoren i Þon fehte; hæfden he to heretoʒe enne hæh-iborene mon. Þeos weolden heom iburʒen and bihalues fleon, and buʒen vt of londe to helpen heore liue. Þat isehʒen Þreo eorles Þe i Þeon fehte weoren ohte, whuderward Þa ferde heore flæmakeden. Þe eorles heom siʒen to mid selen heore cnihtes, driuen heom into ænne hæhne wude Þer heo heærm Þoleden.[46]

> When the Picts had been defeated in the battle, and Rodric was dead and his companions condemned to death, then there fled away fifteen hundred men, the finest who had been in the battle; they had as leader a man nobly born. These men wished to save themselves, preserve their lives, by fleeing away and departing from the land. Three noblemen who had been valiant in the battle saw that, saw in what direction the band made their escape. The noblemen pursued them with their best troops, drove them into a lofty wood where they came to grief. (LB 257)

The idea of hiding in the wood to avoid capture or dishonour is also one of the main elements of the Robin Hood tradition, which by the time these works were written was

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[45] Philippe Walter et al. (eds.), *Le Devin Maudit: Merlin, Lailoken, Suibhne, Textes et Études*, Grenoble: ELLUG, 1999, p. 60; p. 209. Henceforth referred to as "DM"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

[46] W.R.J. Barron, S.C. Weinberg (eds.), *Layamon: Brut, or Hystoria Brutonum*, Harlow: Longman, 1995, p. 256. Henceforth referred to as "LB"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

already quite popular, at least in Britain.[47] Lancelot, Tristan and the other heroes do not run into the wood after being beaten in a real battle; but if one considers the traditional vision of courtly love as a battle, the *militia amoris*, the comparison appears quite natural. As already seen, the vocabulary used gives the general idea of escape and dishonour.

Finally, the wild setting also allows the protagonist to act without being subject to the rules of society.[48] This happens for instance in the case of Tristan and Iseulde, when they escape from the court of King Mark and are said to dwell in the forest,[49] or of those heroes, such as Partonope (PB 16-20; lines 582-714), who meet a fairy lover, or one of her emissaries, in the wood. For Lancelot and the others, the experience in the wood does not seem to allow them to enjoy any forbidden pleasure; however, they are thus able to display some animal-like instincts which they would never be able to pursue elsewhere. While at court, or in a town, the knights are subject to the rules of civilisation, despite their madness: they are properly dressed and must control their aggressiveness. In the wood, on the other hand, they can be naked, engage in comic fights with unlikely enemies such as Lancelot's struggle with the dwarf (MDA 604), and dwell among shepherds (MDA 369). Improbable as these attitudes are in a courteous and refined knight, they must have seemed all the more amusing to the readership of the time, as they created a comicality reminiscent of the carnivalesque upside-down world.

2.2 The Wild Food of the Wood

If the place where people dwelt could determine both geographically and socially whether they were in or out of the community, their diet would represent a clear indicator of their position in the social pyramid. As can be easily inferred, rich and

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[47] Stephen Knight, Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and Other Outlaws Tales, Kalamazoo*: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000, p. 1.
[48] Saunders, p. 49.
[49] Stewart Gregory (ed.), *The Romance of Tristan by Béroul*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992, pp. 60-63.

abundant food meant wealth and a good social position. This is evident, for instance, in the hyperbolic descriptions of banquets in romances. In *Sir Amadas*, for example, the royal feast is said to last no less than a fortnight.[50] In addition, some kinds of food, like meat, were often linked to hospitality or to the hunt, an aristocratic sport. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the lord offers Gawain all the venison he has brought from his hunt; the meat, as we learn from an earlier description, has been scrupulously cut and filleted in order to be cooked (SG 98; lines 1325-1368). A similar concern in sectioning the carcasses of animals can be found in *Sir Tristrem* (lines 458-510),[51] where Tristan first proves his noble blood by teaching the hunters a new way of dividing venison, a method that assigns the different parts of the body of the animal according to the social status of the hunter and is therefore allegedly more refined.[52] The presence of meat in the upper class's diet makes it a symbol of wealth and can represent a way of affirming one's nobility and good manners, as well as his belonging to a civilised society. Moreover, it is not only the quantity or the quality of food, or the way it is prepared, that determines one's status, but also the way it is eaten. When eating on formal occasions, there were precise rules about the attitude one had to assume. In the *Babees Book*, a fifteenth-century book of manners, for example, a very long section is dedicated to how to behave during meals.

> Whenne yee be sette, your knyf withe alle your wytte
> Vnto youre sylf bothe clene and sharpe conserve,
> That honestly yee mowe your owne mete kerve.
> Latte curtesye and sylence withe yow duelle,
> And foule tales looke no one to other telle.
> Kutte withe your knyf your brede, and breke yt nouthe;
> A clene Trenchour byfore yow shalle be brouhte,
> Take your sponys, and soupe by no way,
> And in youre dysshe leve nat your spone, I pray,
> Nor on borde lenynge be yee nat sene,

[50] Edith Rickert (ed.), *Early English Romances: Done into Modern English*, London: Duffild, 1908, p. 62.
[51] Alan Lupack (ed.) *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994, p. 169.
[52] William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006, p. 141.

But from embrowyng the clothe yee kepe clene. (lines 136-147)[53]

In the description of the knights' madness in the wood, the authors generally mention what food the madman eats in the forest. He lives on roots and berries, and meat seems to be quite scarce or even absent. In those cases where the mad knight manages to get hold of some venison, as happens to Ywain (YG 45; lines 1665-1669) or Tristan in the Old French version (MRT 60-63), he eats it raw and bloody.

A knight avoiding meat in this context is surprising for two reasons. First of all, one would expect meat to be the most obvious source of nourishment in the wild setting of the forest. When Tristan and Isolde escape the court of King Mark, they are said to dwell in a cave in the forest and to live on the venison Tristan hunts every day with his bow.[54] And, despite his momentary madness, we certainly would expect an aristocratic warrior to be more skilled in hunting than in recognising edible roots and berries. The second surprising aspect is that, as Susan E. Farrier observes, medieval romances and *chansons de geste* seldom deal with "hungry figures", unless they belong to the lower class; food, as already mentioned, generally represents a way to indicate wealth and power.[55] It is therefore significant that in these cases the readers are provided with detailed information about the protagonist's diet, which for the medieval public might have carried a specific and clear message about the hero's condition.

As mentioned above, this madness has little in common with the hermit's retirement. Similarly, the fasting of these wild madmen seems far from being considered an improvement for their spiritual life; in Malory, for instance, it is explicitly said that

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[53] Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *The babees book, Aristotle's A B C, Urbanitatis, Stans Puer ad Mensam, The Lvtille Childrenes Lvtil Boke, The Bokes of Nurture of Hugh Rhodes and John Russell, Wynkyn de Worde's Boke of Keruynge, The Booke of Demeanor, The Boke of Curtasye, Seager's Schoole of Vertue, &c. &c. with Some French and Latin Poems on like Subjects, and Some Forewords on Education in Early England*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997, p.6.

[54] *The Romance of Tristan by Béroul*, pp. 60-63.

[55] Susan E. Farrier, "Hungry Heroes in Medieval Literature", Melitta Weiss Adamson (ed.), *Food in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995, pp. 145-159, p. 145.

Lancelot's mind is weakened also because of his poor diet.

> But the ermyte myght nat fynde hym his sustenaunce, and so he empeyred and wexed fyeble bothe of body and of hys wytte: for defaute of sustenaunce he waxed more wooder than he was aforetyme. (MDA 608)

Another interesting case is *Sir Orfeo,* where the hero's self-imposed exile in the forest after the disappearance of his wife shares some elements with the religious retirement, such as the *sclavin* (SO 21; line 228) (a garb traditionally used by pilgrims)[56] or the musical meditation which allows him to tame animals (SO 24-25-, lines 267-280). Here, nevertheless, the simple diet consisting only of *rote*, *wild frut*, and *berien, grasse and rinde* seems to be mentioned more to create empathy with this king – whom sorrow caused to renounce all commodities rightfully connected with his position – than to set an example.

> He þat hadde y-werd þe fowe and griis,
> And on bed the purper biis,
> Now on hard heþe he liþ,
> Wiþ leves and gresse he him wriþ.
> He þat hadde had castels and tours,
> River, forest, friþ with flours,
> Now, þei it comenci to snewe and frese,
> þis king mot make his bed in mese.
> He þat had y-had knightes of priis
> Bifor him kneland, and levedis,
> Now seþ he noþing that him liketh,
> Bot wilde wormes bi him strikeþ.
> He þat had y-had plenté
> Of mete and drink, of ich deynté,
> Now may he al day digge and wrote
> Er he finde his fille of rote.
> In somer he liveþ bi wild frut,
> And berien bot gode lite;
> In winter may he no-þing finde
> Bot rote, grases, and þe rinde.
> Al his bodi was oway dwine
> For missays, and al to-chine.
> Lord! who may telle þe sore
> þis king sufferd ten yere and more? (SO 22-24; lines 245-264)

As mentioned above, one of the cases where the hero includes meat in his diet is Ywain, who captures animals and eats them raw (YG 45; lines 1665-1669). When Ywain meets a hermit, after the initial diffidence, the holy man offers him some bread

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[56] Anne Laskaya, Eve Salisbury (eds.), *The Middle English Breton lays*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001 p. 50.

and water and from that moment on, the mad knight brings him all the dead animals he manages to get. The hermit sells their skins in town to buy better bread and offers it to Ywain together with cooked meat (YG 45-46; lines 1679-1708). The holy man therefore does not believe abstinence from meat to be an essential aspect of his retirement; on the contrary, he seems to encourage the inclusion of cooked meat in Ywain's diet, and it is natural to think that as a holy man, he is doing it because he thinks it will improve Ywain's health. This episode allows to focus on what is probably the most obvious implication of the lack of cooked meat in the protagonist's diet in the wood. Cooked venison is here presented together with bread as civilised food,[57] in opposition to the roots, berries and raw meat of the wild man. Even when the mad Ywain tastes civilised food, he still relies on the hermit to prepare it. When looking at the standard preparation of meat in the Middle Ages, the reasons for the wild man's inability to cook it are evident.[58] Meat could be roasted, stewed or boiled but these techniques were also combined. After a tradition dating back to the Roman period and which lasted up to the seventeenth century, meat would often be boiled before being stewed or roasted. This was done both to make the flesh tenderer, and to sterilise it.[59] The author of the Middle English translation seems quite concerned to point out that the meat prepared by the hermit for the wild man is boiled, as he repeats it twice (YG 46; lines 1699; 1701). It is therefore obvious that preparing cooked meat implies a degree of civilisation which Ywain as a madman does not have. And yet, it is significant that the first step towards civilisation is carried out through food and in particular passing from the raw carcasses

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[57] See Jacques Le Goff, "Quelques Remarques sur les Codes Vestimentaire et Alimentaire dans *Erec et Enide*", Reneé Louis et al., *La Chanson de Geste et le Mythe Carolingien: Mélanges Reneé Louis, Publiées par ses Collégues, ses Amis et ses Élèves à l'Occasion de son 75e Anniversaire*, Saint-Père-sous-Vézelay: Musée Archéologique Régional, 1982, pp. 1243-1258; Jacques Le Goff, " Lévi-Strauss en Brocéliande" in Raymond Bellour, Catherine Clément (eds.), *Claude Lévi-Strauss: Textes de et sur Claude Lévi Strauss*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, pp. 265-320.

[58] We know that cooking was not considered an improper activity for knights. After regaining his sanity, Ywain undertakes many adventures which often lead him into the wood. On one of these occasions, he laments that the meal he has cooked lacks salt and wine. The Arthurian knight is therefore capable of preparing and cooking his food if necessity arises.

[59] Massimo Montanari, *Alimentazione e cultura nel Medioevo*, Roma: Laterza, 1988, p. 45.

of animals to simple, but nevertheless cooked food.

Cooked meat presented as a token of civilisation in opposition to the wild environment can be found also in the story of *Grisandole* from the *Prose Merlin*. King Arthur's counsellor, here presented as a wild man, is asked to interpret the Roman Emperor's enigmatic dream, but before granting his help, Merlin asks to be given salted meat – which, as mentioned a few lines later, will be roasted – bread, milk and honey.[60] As in the case of the wild knights, the wild man, despite his wisdom and even though placed in his natural context where meat abounds, seems unable to attain some himself, or at least to cook it. And just as in the case of Ywain, offering cooked food seems to be the first indispensable move in order to establish a civilised relationship with someone. On the other hand, if the wild man cannot prepare cooked food, he certainly seems to appreciate it. Merlin is said to grasp the spit from the servant's hand and to eat the meat greedily.

> After he behilde towarde the fier and saugh the flesshe that the knave hadde rosted that was tho inough, and raced it of with hondes madly, and rente it asonder in peces, and wette it in mylke and after in the hony, and ete as a wood man that nought ther lefte of the flesh. (PM 228)

Hence, it is evident that, in the case of these mad knights, the abstinence from meat is not something they embrace voluntarily to recreate a sort of religious fasting, but rather a condition impossible to avoid without external help because they seem to have lost nearly all cognition of what the life of a civilised man implies. Even when they experience the difference between raw venison and cooked meat, as in the case of Ywain, they are unable to reproduce cooked food. More than the ability of governing and hunting animals, it is here the skill of cooking venison which distinguishes the savage from the civilised man.

As they do for the wild setting, the authors of these romances might have

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[60] John Conlee (ed.), *Prose Merlin*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998, p. 227. Henceforth referred to as "PM"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

decided to include specific indications about the hero's poor diet because of the complex pattern of information probably contained in these details.

A hungry chivalric hero, as already said, is something which cannot be found frequently in romance literature since hunger was seen as a characteristic of the lower classes. As a consequence, lack of food tended to be associated with figures which displayed a non-knightly nature and a certain propensity for violence.[61] The comparison with the clownish figures from fairs and carnival celebrations arises quite spontaneously. The association between lack of food and comic element is also implicit in the episodes of Tristan's and Lancelot's madness, when these heroes are temporarily brought back in society as fools. In the case of Tristan, he is welcomed in a group of herdsmen and shepherds, who share with him some of *theyr mete and drynke* and punish the mad knight for any misdeed beating him with their rods and treating him like a fool (MDA 369). Similarly, when Lancelot is found and brought at King Pelles' court, he is thrown *mete* and he is appointed court fool (MDA 608-609). In both cases, once again there seems to be a strict connection between the status of wild madman and that of the clown, probably because their madness and ignorance of social rules make them both unfit for civilised society. Interestingly, they are assigned the role of "fool" immediately after the concession of food, thus reinforcing the correlation between comic and non-civilised figures with fasting, and implying the inability of the madman or of the fool to provide himself with civilised nourishment. It is therefore very likely that the poor diet of roots and berries adopted by these mad knights, who used once to be refined courtly lovers and to attend the banquets of their kings, had also the function of creating a comic contrast. The lack of meat, or of cooked meat in the case of Ywain, in the diet of these mad knights must have had the same humorous, and at the same time disturbing, impact on medieval readers as the idea of them running in the forest without

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[61] Farrier, p. 146.

their armour. Meat comes to be an indirect symbol of the courtly world they have forsaken in their madness.

The indication of a diet without meat probably represented also a virtual inversion of the social order. As mentioned above, meat and expensive food were a means of affirming one's wealth and social position. For these characters, giving up meat, the most natural food for a nobleman, in order to adopt a diet of roots and berries was a clear indication of a change in their status. To the medieval audience, this probably suggested quite clearly that these knights had lost all their nobility, and that their condition was even lower than the peasants', since in the diet of the wild knight, bread is not included, unless it is introduced by some external figures. Unlike meat, which in extreme circumstances can be eaten raw as in the case of Ywain, bread cannot be found in nature and consequently needs to be prepared thus representing even more clearly a mark of civilisation. Besides, bread is charged with a strong religious symbolism; it thus becomes evident that these mad knights have given up the lifestyle, customs and beliefs of the society where they used to belong and they have become little more than animals. The details about the hero's diet and the lack of meat are probably aimed at giving a clear indication of the social position he acquires in his frenzy. Moreover, this reversion of the social status, and its association with food, is reminiscent once more of those carnival festivities during which the social order was forgotten, even though for a short time, and the comic element and food were strictly connected.[62]

Another aspect that we need to take into account is that appetite and diet were thought to be strictly connected with one's physical and mental health. Some typologies of food were believed to provoke madness, as explains the thirteenth-century physician

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[62] Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval Britain*, Manchester: Mancester University Press, 2001, p. 32.

Bernard de Gordon.[63] At the same time, lack of good nourishment was thought to be one of the possible reasons for one's insanity.[64] The twelfth century cleric Hugues de Fouilloy affirms, after the teachings of Hippocrates, that it is sometimes the weakness of the body that prevents the balance of the mind.[65] This happens, as already mentioned, to Lancelot who runs after a boar in the forest; wounded by the animal, he is found by a hermit who heals him but, unlike Ywain's holy man, cannot find him proper nourishment. The knight is therefore said to weaken both in body and in mind and we learn that after this experience, he is more insane than ever, precisely because of the lack of food (MDA 608). The lack of meat in the hero's diet in the wood is therefore to be read as a further symptom of madness, and it justifies the long periods of insanity and the difficulty to heal.

A change in the diet can be seen also as a reminiscence of the story of Nebuchadnezzar. During his seven years of madness, the Babylonian king is condemned to eat grass like an ox. The association between madness, bestiality and eating grass seems evident also in the *Tristano Panciatichiano*, a fourteenth-century Tuscan rendition of the Roman de *Tristan en Prose*.

> E Tristano se ne va istracciando suoi panni che .v. fratelli li avieno fatti et era diventato tanto magro e palido che parea una bestia e era piloso perciò che non mangiava altro ch'erbe.[66]

> And Tristan goes along, tearing the clothes that the five brothers had given him. And he had become so thin and pallid that he seemed a beast, and he was hairy because he didn't eat anything except the grasses.[67]

It is also necessary to make some considerations about one of the most popular medical approaches in the Middle Ages: the theory of the four temperaments. Any alteration in the bodily humours could break the delicate physical balance and affect

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[63] Bernardus de Gordonio, *Opus Lilium Medicinae Inscriptum, De Morborum, Prope Omnium Curatione, Septem Particulis Distributum*, Lugduni: Gulielmum Rouillium, 1559, p. 203.

[64] Constantine the African, *Della Melancolia*, trans. M. T. Malato, U. de Martini, Roma: Tip. E. Cossidente, 1959, p. 54.

[65] Jacques Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 176, Paris: Garnier 1880, p. 1197.

[66] Gloria Allaire (ed.), *Il Tristano Panciatichiano*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, p. 312.

[67] *Il Tristano Panciatichiano*, p. 313.

one's personality and tastes. Similarly, one would prefer foods conforming to his or her humours and avoid "incompatible" nourishment.[68] Assuming that the knight's madness in these cases might depend, more or less directly, on an imbalance in bodily humours, they might be avoiding animal flesh, a warm and moist food,[69] because they present an opposite temperament. Dry and cold temperament meant melancholy, whose corresponding element is earth, and this would explain Lancelot's and the other heroes' preference for roots and berries, similarly linked to earth.

Melancholy, as we will see in next chapter, was also strictly connected with love-sickness;[70] it would be therefore natural to associate this kind of madness, generated by a love delusion, with the traditional suffering lover. This alteration both in body and mind would, among other things, affect appetite, and it is therefore not unusual to find a lover displaying refusal towards food. Andreas Capellanus in his *De Amore* affirms that he who suffers from love generally eats and sleeps very little.[71] This can be seen also in the case of Chaucer's Troilus. In his sorrow for Cryseide, the hero refuses any kind of food.[72] As noted above, the cause of the Arthurian heroes' wild madness generally resides in their love life; thus, it is natural to assume that their poor diet might be an indication of the traditional love sickness. However, except for Tristan, who initially eats very little of the food offered by the damsel (MDA 369), these wild madmen do not seem to refuse food when offered. Tristan himself later on is said to continue to attend the group of shepherds because he finds nurture there (MRT 248), and when brought back to court does not refuse the "hote suppyngis" they give him

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[68] Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Food and the Body: Some Peculiar Questions in the High Medieval Theology*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 221.
[69] Rossella Omicciolo Valentini, *Mangiare Medievale, alimentazione e cucina medievale tra storia, ricette e curiosità*, Latina: Edizioni Penne e Papiri, 2005, p. 31.
[70] Jacques Ferrand, *A Treatise on Love Sickness, Syracuse,* New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990, p. 253.
[71] P. G. Walsh (ed.), *Andreas Capellanus: On Love*, London Duckworth, 1982, p. 282.
[72] Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 480. Henceforth referred to as "RC"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

(MDA 373). As already said, these mad knights seem simply unable to provide themselves with civilised food. As happened for Nebuchadnezzar who was condemned to live like a beast and eat grass like an ox (Daniel 4: 25-30), there is no intentional reason for the diet they have in the forest, but they have the same range of choice attributed to a wild animal: roots, berries, occasional raw venison and what more civilised members of society offer them. For this reason, they seem to be radically opposed to the melancholic lover, who generally can count on all the most refined comforts but is not able to enjoy them because of his despair. There is no nobility in their hunger, because they seem to have no more choice than a stray or a beggar. Naturally, the idea of love sickness and lack of appetite might have been recalled by this madness in the wood, but while the melancholic lover with his renunciation to food seems to place himself above material needs and worries to focus on something spiritual and therefore superior, the wild knights are subject to very earthly needs and are condemned to a very low position, since they are obliged to beg for food.

Finally, the Middle English translator adds the detail of Ywain's drinking the blood of the animals he has killed (YG 45; lines 1669-1670). Penelope Doob suggested that this might be an allusion to a common remedy for melancholy, consisting in drinking blood, and that the cure has no effect on the protagonist because his madness is due to spiritual reasons rather than to a physical dysfunction.[73] According to Dorothy Yamamoto, the author's statement that the blood Ywain drank "did him mekil gode" is meant to stress the nourishing proprieties of the blood.[74] However, in medieval literature, the action of drinking blood is often associated with negative figures. In the twelfth century, Walter Map in his *De Nugis Curialium* reports popular legends about

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[73] Doob, p. 38.
[74] Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 183.

vampires.[75] In his *Chronica Majora*, the thirteenth-century chronicler Matthew Paris describes the Tartars as a primitive and cruel population, whose people are closer to animals that to humans to the point that they drink blood and eat the flesh of dogs and even of humans.[76] Drinking blood is therefore one of the characterising elements of exotic and barbaric populations. Another example can be found in the fourteenth-century romance *The Sultan of Babylon*, where the ferocious sultan Leban and his son are said to drink blood.

> Thai blewe hornes of bras;
> Thai dronke beestes bloode.
> Milke and hony ther was,
> That was roial and goode.
> Serpentes in oyle were fryed
> To serve the Sowdon with-alle (lines 683-688)[77]

The protagonists do not drink human blood, but the blood of animals, like Ywain; however, to the audience this act must have sounded disgusting, just like eating snakes fried in oil, as described some lines later. Later on, the sultan makes his vassals drink the blood of animals to excite their courage.

> All these people was gadred to Agremore,
> Thre hundred thousand of Sarsyns felle,
> Some bloo, some yolowe, some blake as More,
> Some horible and stronge as devel of helle.
> He made hem drinke wilde beestes bloode,
> Of tigre, antilope and of camalyon,
> As is her use to egre her mode,
> When thai in were to battayle goon. (lines 1003 -1010)[78]

The animals whose blood is drunk are dangerous and exotic as Leban's vassals, who are described as "horible and stronge as devel of helle". Even though it is implied that the

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[75] M. R. James (ed.), *De Nugis Curialium, Courtiers' Trifles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, pp. 160-162.

[76] Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Matthei Parisiensis, Monaci Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, Vol. iv, London: Kraus Reprint, 1964.

[77] Alan Lupack (ed.), *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990, p. 25.

[78] *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, p. 34.

blood is drunk for his strengthening properties, this ritual is probably meant to inspire horror in the medieval audience. In the case of Ywain, the action of drinking blood could be similarly aimed at giving a touch or horror as well as of exoticism.

2.3 Clothes

Among the characteristics of these mad knights, there generally is a lack of proper clothing. Even more than their diet or the wild setting, their attire must have provided the readers with very specific information about the character's state. In the Middle Ages, clothing had a more explicit social meaning than it has today;[79] besides, it is the first visual element which allows the other characters of the story, and consequently the audience, to classify the protagonist. In these episodes, the knights either give up all clothes, as in the case of Tristan (MDA 369), or are clad simply in their shirt, as happens to Lancelot, who is said to wear only his "shurte and his breke" (MDA 604). Despite his "shurte and his breke", Lancelot is described as naked in the Old French version (FL 36). Nakedness here needs therefore to be considered not in terms of disclosing taboo parts of the human body but rather in terms of lack of a distinctive social mark.

The act of tearing one's clothes often indicates despair, or rage. This can be seen for instance in *Sir Orfeo*, where Dame Herodis expresses her grief at the perspective of being separated from her husband by tearing her clothes and scratching her body (SO 7-8; lines 77-82), but also in iconographic representations. In the fourteenth-century *Tacuina Sanitatis*, for example, the description of rage is accompanied by the image of a woman with her dress open on the breast and tearing a piece of cloth.[80]

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[79] Frédérique Lachaud, "Dress and Social Status in England before the Sumptuary Laws", Peter Cross, Maurice Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002, pp. 105-124, pp. 105-106.

[80] Carmelia Opsomer (ed.), *L'Art de vivre en santé: images et recettes du moyen âge: le Tacuinum Sanitatis (manuscrit 1041) de la Bibliothèque de l'Université de Liège*, Alleur: Éditions du Perron, 1991, p. 157.

Giving up one's clothing means also renouncing one's role in society, especially considering that Lancelot and the others are generally associated with their sword, shield and armour, the attributes of the knight. The renunciation on the part of the protagonist to the emblems of his social status probably underlined the seriousness of his madness. Another consequence of getting rid of their armour or the fine clothes, is that these knights become unrecognisable. The fact that nobody recognises them depends also on their exposure to the wild environment and their inappropriate diet which deeply alters their body. Ywain is described by the lady who finds him as ugly (YG 47; line 1739), Tristan is said to have become "leane and poore in flesh" (MDA 369) and Lancelot is said to be restored to his former beauty during his stay in Castell Blanke. (MDA 606) However, even after being bathed, properly fed and elegantly attired, the knights are often still not recognised, as happens for instance to Tristan and Lancelot (MDA 373; 606; 608). The importance of the armour for recognition is not an unusual theme. As observed also in "Madness and Gender in Late Medieval English Literature",[81] many chivalric plots are centred on the fact that wearing another knight's armour is a disguise. From the *Iliad,* where Patroclus is mistaken for Achilles because he is wearing his armour, to the fight between Tancredi and Clorinda in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, the failed recognition linked to the set of arms has always been an excellent narrative pretext to oppose two unlikely enemies. Something similar happens in *Ywain,* as in the final duel the protagonist finds himself tragically opposing his best friend Gawain (YG 93; lines 3513-3518). In Malory, the two brothers Balin and Balan kill each other because their shields are exchanged and they cannot recognise each other (MDA 67-69). Similarly, in *The Fair Maid of Astolat*, Lancelot fights *incognito* against Arthur's knights, and this is made possible simply by borrowing a shield from the old

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[81]   Laura Jose, "Madness and Gender in Late-Medieval English Literature", doctorar diss. University of Durham, 2010, pp. 158-159.

baron Sir Barnarde and accepting to wear an embroidered sleeve from his daughter (MDA 758). If the recognisability of the knight therefore depends on small details such as the shield or the sleeve tied on the helmet, the total lack of armour and weapons must have represented a most efficient way of hiding one's identity. By renouncing their armours and weapons these knights are thus not only disguising themselves, but also somehow giving up their own selves.

The connection between poor attire, hidden identity and madness can also be found in the twelfth-century *Folie Tristan*, where the protagonist disguises himself as a madman (lines 189-218)[82] in order to see the queen once more. Unlike what happens in the episodes of wild madness, in this case, disguise is fully intentional, but it nevertheless relies on the same elements found in the description of mad Lancelot, such as the dark skin or the shaven hair (FL 45). Even though the reasons for the external change are different, the effect for the medieval readership must have been the same. Moreover, as happens in the *Folie Tristan*, the fact that the wild knights are not recognisable is what allows most narrative developments; without being *incognito,* Lancelot would probably never have been chained like a beast, chased and beaten by the young men of Corbyn or been treated as a fool (MDA 606-608).

The lack of refined clothes could also symbolise the renunciation to the civilised world for the wilderness. This seems confirmed by fact that when Lancelot and the other knights are healed and reintroduced back in society, the first things they are given are food and proper clothes. In Layamon's *Brut,* when King Uther establishes his court in Winchester, the Saxons decide to infiltrate six knights in his court in the guise of beggars in order to murder him. Their disguise involves "hairy shirts" and a diet supposedly consisting only of bread and water.

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[82] Ian Short (ed.), *The Anglo-Norman Folie Tristan*, London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1993, pp.7-8. Henceforth referred to as "FT"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

And seide to than kinge: "Lauerd, beo thu on sunde; herute sitteth six men, iliche on heouwen; alle heo beoth iferen, iscrudde mid heren. While heo weoren a thissere worlde-richen godfulle theines, mid goden afeolled; nu habbeoth Saexisce men isaet hom to grunden, that beoth on weorlde for wracchen ihalden; no racceoth heo to borde buten braed ane, no to heore drenches bute water scenches. thus heo leodeth heore lif inne thire leode, and heore beoden biddeth that Godd the lete longe libben." (LB 504-506)

And said to the king: "Good health to you, my lord; outside sit six men, alike in appearance; they are all companions, all clothed in hair shirts. Once they were worthy knights in this realm, possessed of wealth; now the Saxons have brought them low, so that they are held by all the world to be paupers; at meals they eat nothing but bread alone, nothing to drink but a draught of water. And so they lead their lives among your people, and offer up their prayers that God may let you live long." (LB 505-507)

The lack of clothing is indicative of an unacceptable level of poverty, of a fault in the social organisation which has to be amended. This idea is not absent in these episodes of wild madness; in the case of Ywain, both in the Old French and in the Middle English version, the maiden, after healing him, leaves the clothes next to the sleeping man and hides. This kind gesture is aimed at preventing Ywain from knowing that he has been seen in that poor state (YG 48; lines 1785-1788). Lancelot is also temporarily kept in ignorance of what has happened to him, and when he finally manages to know the truth from king Pelles, he becomes so ashamed that he asks for a secluded place to end his days (FL 66-67).

The lack of clothing here is probably also a symbol of madness; in medieval manuscript illuminations, the fool is often depicted without clothes, or dressed only with something which might be identified as "shurte and breke". This can be seen for example in the many illuminations of Psalm 52 ("dixit insipiens in corde suo non est deus") where the fool affirms the non-existence of God. The fool often wears only a pair of shorts and is roughly covered with a cloth, as for instance in the Psautier de Jean de Berry[83] (about 1386; fig. 1), or in the Macclesfield Psalter[84] (fourteenth century; fig. 2), where, despite the damaged image, one can distinguish within the initial a fool

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[83] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms Fr. 13091, f.106r (known as Psautier de Jean de Berry).
[84] Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Ms 1-2005, f.77r (known as Macclesfield Psalter).

undressed but for his hood. In the St Omer Psalter[85] (fourteenth century; fig. 3), the fool is naked only in the lower part of his body but this seems nevertheless to generate embarrassment in the surrounding knights who turn away from him. In the Ormesby Psalter[86] (fourteenth century; fig. 4-5), we find a very surprising representation of the fool. Unlike the other manuscripts, this does not show a God-denying fool, but a marginal representation of King Solomon and Marcolf. The peasant fool is represented as naked, but for a small mantel, while riding a goat and holding a rabbit. This scene seems quite close to an episode from the *Vita Merlini*; when he arrives at his wife's wedding, Merlin is riding a stag and is surrounded by animals (DM 86). The illuminator here inserted a very specific fool, with traits which place him in strict correlation with the figure of Merlin.

There are many biblical antecedents for the sense of shame and madness that the lack of clothes implies. King Saul for example is said to experience a prophet-like possession while chasing David, and to tear off his clothes before starting to make prophetic announcements (Samuel I, 19:23-24).

> et abiit in Nahioth in Rama et factus est etiam super eum spiritus Dei et ambulabat ingrediens et prophetabat usque dum veniret in Nahioth in Rama et expoliavit se etiam ipse vestimentis suis et prophetavit cum ceteris coram Samuhel et cecidit nudus tota die illa et nocte unde et exivit proverbium num et Saul inter prophetas?

> He went there, toward Naioth in Ramath; and the spirit of God came upon him. As he was going, he fell into a prophetic frenzy, until he came to Naioth in Ramath. He too stripped off his clothes, and he too fell into a frenzy before Samuel. He lay naked all that day and all that night. Therefore it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

The scene described here seems a case of epilepsy, which was believed to bring along the gift of prophecy. Elsewhere, the lack of clothing indicates extreme poverty, as in Job 22:6 and Job 24:10. And finally, nakedness is a shame reserved for prisoners (Isaiah 20:4):

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[85] London, British Library, Yates Thompson Ms 14, folio 57v (known as St Omer Psalter).
[86] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 366, folio 71v (known as Ormesby Psalter).

sic minabit rex Assyriorum captivitatem Aegypti et transmigrationem Aethiopiae iuvenum et senum nudam et disculciatam discopertis natibus ignominiam Aegypti.

so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethyopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

In Layamon's *Brut,* nakedness becomes also a symptom of disorder. After being sent to Ireland, Pantolaos decides to set strict laws for his men to follow, as, after spending such a long time at sea, they are becoming wild and uncontrollable. The main symptom for this disorder seems to be indifference towards clothing.

Gurguint heom sende into Irlonde thar nas nauer nan man seotthen Noes flod hit hauede ouergan; and Gurguint forth wende into thisse londe. and Pantolaos ther ʒeonde wunde we'll mid thon beste and lette hine clepie king. and his wif quene. and he sette stronge lawen to steowien his folke, for heo haueden inne sae seorwen ibidene, fulleseouen ʒere heo misliche foren. heore clathes weoren iwerede and vuele heo weoren igaerede, nakede heo weoren and anthing ne rohten wa heore leome saeʒe alle the on heom weoren. and thus heo ladden heore laʒen and longe heo ilaesten. (LB 162)

Gurguint sent them into Ireland, which had been uninhabited since Noah's flood had covered it; and Gurguint journeyed on to this land. And Pantolaus lived over there in all contentment and had himself proclaimed king and his wife queen. And he established strong laws to control his people, for they had endured privation at sea, they had been adrift fully seven years. Their clothes were worn out and they were ill-clad, naked they were and cared not a whit who saw every part of their bodies. And so they established their laws which long endured. (LB 163)

Similarly, when Lancelot leaves Camelot, the other knights set off to look for him, and their main anxiety seems to be that he is "a naked man in his shurte wyth a swerde in hys honde"(MDA 596). This concern on the part of Lancelot's friends might be due not only to the shame deriving from the hero's nakedness, and to the sense of disorder which the image of a knight without his armour generates, but also to the potential danger for himself and others that the situation involves: Lancelot is wandering without armour but nevertheless with a sword in his hand, a clear signal of aggressiveness. The lack of armour therefore underlines the sense of blind and suicidal aggressiveness from which the madman must be protected.

Finally, nakedness is also a characteristic of the professional fool and of the wild man – a figure which might have influenced these episodes of wild madness, as will be analysed in Chapter 6. Before 1350, fools were represented not only in colourful attires, but also naked.[87] Once again, the mad knights share some of the characteristics of comical figures from Carnival where the comic element derives from a reversion of the social world as it is known. The wild man generally relies on his own fur or on foliage for the protection of his body. However, the wild man is not necessarily covered only by his hair; he is sometimes dressed with animal fur, as in the case of Merlin. Even though the mad knights are not dressed with animal skins, like Merlin, sometimes they present abundant fur-like hair. In the Welsh version of Ywain's adventures, *Owein and the Lady of the Fountain*,[88] the hero grows hair all over his body after giving up his clothes, and in the case of Partonope we are told that "wyth hir his visage was ouergrowe" (PB 286; line 7288). Tristan, Lancelot and Ywain do not grow hair in such an extreme fashion and this lack of wild hair might prove useful in terms of narrative. Although they do not recognise them, those who meet the mad knights decide to look after them when they realise how handsome the mad knights are, despite their poor conditions, and infer that they must have been men of some importance before losing their sanity (MDA 608). A madman covered with hair would probably have inspired more fear than pity, and it would have been more difficult to justify the episodes in which the madman is introduced at court.

[87]   Andrew Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 196.
[88]   Gwyn Jones, Thomas Jones (ed.), *The Mabinogion*, London: Dent, 1989, p. 174.

3
Madness and Medieval Medicine

Trying to place literary episodes of madness into a precise medical category would probably be inappropriate. First, we need to bear in mind that in romance literature descriptions are aimed more at creating a sense of wonder and surprise rather than at giving realistic images. Moreover, most information we have about medieval medicine comes from treatises and manuals probably meant for a very selected readership; consequently we cannot assume that the writers and audience of these romances were necessarily acquainted with all the medical theories of the time. An additional problem is constituted by the general nature of the terms used to indicate madness in the romances here analysed. Chrétiens de Troyes in his *Yvain* simply says that "Lors li monta uns Troubeillons/El chief, si grant quë il forsane" (CL 114; lines 2808-2809; CL 115 "Then such a great whirlwind arose in his head that he went mad"); the author of the *Folie Lancelot* similarly states that "il en ot si grant duel qu'il n'en oissi fors de sens" (FL 21); ("And he felt such an inner pain for it that he went out of his mind" translation mine). Malory, both in the Tristan's story and in Lancelot's, simply states that the protagonist was mad or that he displayed clear signs of insanity (MDA 369; 594). Even when more specific terms occur, like *forsener* (CRT 143) or *melancholie* (CL 122; line 3009), the context seems to suggest that they are used in their generic meaning.

On the other hand, this wild madness presents precise characteristics, occurring in all episodes. Some of the details given might have echoed in the readership's minds some of the symptoms of certain typologies of madness which were probably quite known at the time or to recall some popular beliefs about madness.

Medieval medical theories often blended with religious and popular beliefs. Chaucer's presentation of the physician in *The Canterbury Tales* gives a hint of how medicine could be influenced by what nowadays would be considered superstition.

> With us ther was a Doctour of Phisik;
> In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik,
> To speke of phisik and of surgerye,
> For he was grounded in astronomye.
> He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
> In houres by his magyk natureel.
> Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent
> Of his ymages for his pacient.
> He knew the cause of everich maladye,
> Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,
> And where they engendred, and of what humour.
> He was a verray, parfit pratiksour:
> The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,
> Anon he yaf the sike man his boote.
> Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries
> To sende hym drogges and his letuaries
> For ech of hem made oother for to wynne-
> Hir frendshippe nas nat newe to beginne.
> Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,
> And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,
> Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,
> Serapion, Razis, and Avycen,
> Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,
> Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn.(RC 30; lines 411-434)

It is not easy to understand whether the portrait of the physician is satirical or not. In medieval culture, astrology was perceived as a science, and one would often recur to the "magyk natureel", when other remedies failed. From Chaucer's description we also infer that even non-specialised readers knew who were the principal medical authors. Chaucer's list reflects the three main categories of medical authorities known at the time. Some, like Aesculapius, Dioscorides (first century), Rufus (first century B.C.), Hippocrates (fifth century B.C.) and Galen (second century), belonged to the classical tradition; others, namely Haly Abbas (tenth century), Serapion the Elder (ninth century), Rhazes (ninth century), Avycen (tenth century), Averroës (twelfth century), John of Damascus (eighth century) and Constantine the African (1019-1087), were Arabic writers whose works had been translated and imported in Europe. Also European writers

like Bernard of Gordon (thirteenth century), John of Gaddesden (fourteenth century) and Gilbertus Anglicus (thirteenth century) were considered authorities.

If medicine in general was often influenced by superstition and popular beliefs, insanity in particular was connected with the acting of superior forces, either positive or negative; the fool could be an emissary of God or the instrument of the devil, depending on the cause of his insanity.[89] When madness did not mean that you were chosen by God, it could be a divine punishment for your sins, or a case of Satanic possession. Despite the undeniable preponderance of the theological theory, other currents were developed as well. By the end of the twelfth century, Galenic theories on madness and its cures were quite popular in the major university schools in Europe.[90] As mentioned above, a medieval scholar could study the secrets of the human body both on texts written by European authors and on adaptations of Arabic works, as for example Constantine the African's *De Melancholia*, an adaptation of the Arabic work on melancholy by the scholar Ishâq ibn' Imrân. Moreover, Constantine left some pages about lethargy, mania and phrenitis,[91] other typologies of mental illness known at the time.

Women were not totally excluded from medical lore. An important contribution to medieval studies on madness is *Causae et Curae* by Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179). Being the prioress first at Disibodenberg and then at Rupertsberg she seems to have had deep knowledge of herbal medicine. In the section dedicated to mental illnesses and their treatments, her observations and suggestions seem based above all on practice, as she was in charge of curing the various pilgrims who asked for assistance in her monastery.[92]

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[89] Muriel Laharie, *La Folie au Moyen Âge: XI-XIII siècles*, Paris: Le Leopard d'Or, 1991, p. 23.
[90] Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, "Yvain's Madness" in *Philological Quarterly* (71), 1992, pp. 377-97, p. 379.
[91] Laharie, p. 118.
[92] For further biographical information about Hildegard von Bingen see Barbara Jane Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine*, Aldershot: Scolar press, 1987; Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: a Visionary Life*, London, New York: Routledge, 1991.

Practical manuals such as the *Causae and Curae* were not the only texts accessible to non-professional readers. Two more important medical works, both written about 1240, were the *Compendium Medicinae*, by Gilbertus Anglicus, and *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, by Bartholomeus Anglicus. The latter in particular aimed at making the scientific knowledge of his time more accessible also to non-specialised readers.[93] Finally, it is worth remembering Arnaldus de Villa Nova and his studies on love madness (*Speculum Medicinae*, *De Parte Operativa*, and his *De Amore Heroïco*), and the anonymous Neapolitan author who wrote the *Breviarium Medicinae Praticae*,[94] a manual on the symptoms and the treatments of mania and melancholy.

The main typologies[95] of madness may have been easily distinguishable even among people who did not have an advanced medical education; after all, some of them had very specific symptoms. As mentioned above, the encyclopedic nature of some medical works, such as *The Proprietatibus Rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Hildegard's *Causae et Curae* and the anonymous *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*, suggests that they were probably targeted also to a readership which had only a generic medical knowledge; these treatises will therefore be given particular attention in this analysis, even though also more specialistic texts, such as Bernard de Gordon's *Lilium Medicinae*, will be taken into account.

3.1.1 Demonic Possession

The theological interpretation was the most popular explanation of mental illnesses up

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[93] M. C. Seymour, *Bartholomaeus Anglicus and His Encyclopedia*, Aldershot, Brookfield: Variorum, 1992, pp. 10; 12.

[94] The work was originally attributed to Arnaldus de Villa Nova; see Sebastià Giralt, "La Tradition Médicale d'Arnaud de Villeneuve, du Manuscrit à l'Imprimé", *Médiévales* 52, 2007, pp. 75-88, p. 80.

[95] Epilepsy, although nearly always present in the medical texts of the time, will not be taken into account in this analysis. First, because authors generally use very specific names for it, unlike what happens for these Arthurian heroes; in addition, none of the mad knights presents those symptoms which made this illness so unmistakeably recognisable.

to the fourteenth century;[96] it is therefore natural to suppose that Lancelot's and the other knights' madness could be seen also in terms of demonic possession.

In these romances, the protagonist's insanity is never explicitly described as a possession. However, in *Ywain and Gawain* it is stated that "an evyl toke him als he stode; For wa he wex al wilde and wode" (YG 45; lines 1649-1650); the general word "evyl" could simply refer to madness and had the author wanted to indicate precisely a demonic presence, he would probably have been more specific as happens in other texts. In the Bible, for example, Saul's possession (1 Samuel 16:14-15) is described rather explicitly.

> spiritus autem Domini recessit a Saul et exagitabat eum spiritus nequam a Domino. Dixeruntque servi Saul ad eum ecce spiritus Dei malus exagitat te.

> Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you".

Even if nothing explicit is said, the conception of madness as a diabolic spirit which takes temporarily hold of the patient's mind seems to be somehow implied in more than one of the romances analysed.

In the French *Folie Lancelot* (FL 37), for example, Lancelot during his madness is described as a *deables,* a devil. This might of course be attributed to the excessive aggressiveness of the hero, but it is nevertheless interesting that the term chosen should be connected with the idea of a diabolic presence rather than with mere madness or wonder or monstrosity. Moreover, when the maid finds Ywain, in the French version of the poem she crosses herself (CL 118; line 2917) and the magic ointment which she uses to heal him is supposed to "drive the rage out of his head" (CL 120; lines 2959-2958); the verb used here is the Old French *oster*, which means "to remove". This seems to suggest the idea of the extirpation of a diabolic presence in the protagonist's mind, something which is apparently confirmed by the Lancelot episode, where the

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[96]   Hawkins, p. 379.

knight if finally healed with the Holy Grail. The author therefore implies that Lancelot's madness can be cured only by means of an extremely powerful holy object. In addition, as in the case of Ywain, in the French *Folie Lancelot*, the vocabulary here used seems to suggest that what Lancelot needs is a kind of exorcism.

> assés se combati l'ennemy qui dedens Lancelot estoit quìil y demorast […] et quant il s'en ala sachés qu'il emporta ung grant pan de la coverture du palais. (FL 65)

> The enemy which was inside Lancelot, and which wanted to remain there, fought for a long time […] and when it departed, it demolished a great section of the façade of the palace. (translation mine)

Here not only is the hero's insanity defined as "the enemy", the usual epithet for the devil, but it is almost as if the madness itself was fighting against the Holy Grail and was extirpated from Lancelot's body as an evil spirit, so powerful that it even destroys part of the palace in which the Holy Grail is contained. The detail of a destroyed architecture connected with exorcism is present also in the *Vita Norberti*[97] where the demon threatens to destroy the vaults of the church.

The mad heroes seem to share some of the external characteristics of the possessed as well. The possessed is generally dressed in a very simple way; sometimes he is nearly undressed. This can be seen, for instance, in one of the illuminations of the *Prayer book of Saint Hildegard* (twelfth century; fig. 6)[98], where the scene of the exorcism of the Canaanite woman's daughter is represented; here the possessed is depicted as half naked. As already seen, Lancelot and the other knights are very poorly dressed during their madness.

A connection with the devil could somehow re-enforce the sense of comicality of the episode. Medieval anecdotes of encounters with the devil did not always have merely didactic aims but could sometimes have also the function of exorcising the fear

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[97] Theodore James Antry, Carol Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2007, p. 141.
[98] Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms Clm 935, fol. 25v (known as Prayer book of Saint Hildegard).

of Satan with laughter.[99]   The devil could be cheated, humiliated or even violently beaten by those who encountered him.[100] A similar humour, and the idea of striking someone who could represent a potential danger to the community, can be found in the scene of Lancelot's arrival in Corbyn, where he is thrown stones by the local young men (MDA 608). Also Tristan is beaten "with roddys" (MDA 369) by the shepherds, even if in a less dramatic fashion. Beating someone was not only an act of cruelty or of scorn, but sometimes it could also constitute an efficient exorcism. This can be seen, for instance, in the second book of the *Dialogues of Gregory I*, the sixth-century collection of dialogues and reflections written by Pope Gregory I. The anecdote describes one of the miracles of Saint Benedict; in one of the monasteries he had funded, there happened to be a monk who was unable to remain still while the other prayed, but used to walk around. Benedict saw that the cause of this strange behaviour was a small dark demon who dragged the monk outside the church; after informing the other monks, the holy man delivered the man from the devil by beating him.

> Die igitur alia, expleta oratione, uir Dei, oratorium egressus, stantem foris monachum repperit, quem pro caecitate cordis sui uirga percussit. Qui ex illo die nihil persuasionis ulterius a nigro iam puerulo pertulit, sed ad orazioni studium inmobilis permansit, sicque antiquus hostis dominari non ausus est est in eius cogitazione, ac si ipse percussus fuisset ex uerbere. [101]

> The following day, coming outside of the church after the prayers, the holy man found the monk who was staying outside and he whipped him for the blindness of his heart. The monk, from that day on, could no way be tempted by the little dark man again, but he remained still during the prayers. And the ancient enemy no longer dared to dominate his mind, as if he himself had been whipped. (translation mine)

Elsewhere, Benedict drives the devil out of a possessed monk by slapping him.[102]

There are, however, some important differences between the cases of possession

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[99] Jeffrey B. Russell, *Il diavolo nel Medioevo* (*Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Age*) , trans. F. Cezzi, Bari: Editori Laterza, 1987, p. 49.

[100] Jeffrey Russell, pp. 50-64.

[101] Attilio Stendardi (ed.), *Opere di Gregorio Magno: Dialoghi (I-IV)*, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2000, pp. 150-152.

[102] *Opere di Gregorio Magno: Dialoghi (I-IV)*, p. 194.

and the mad lovers. The fiend generally acts in the person he possesses as a second personality. In one of the anecdotes reported in the *Dialogus Miraculorum* by Cesarius Von Heinsterbach, for example, the demon is said to speak literally through the mouth of the possessed.[103] However, Lancelot and the others present a rather consistent, even though illogical, nature during their frenzy. They do not seem to act under the impulse of a second mind in their body; on the contrary, they seem deprived of any rationality. Besides, the cases of possession are generally immediately recognised by the other members of the community, or at least by the local religious authorities. This does not happen in the case of the madmen; even during their encounters with the hermits in the wood, they are always identified as madmen, never as possessed. Obviously, literary descriptions of demonic possessions generally belong to hagiographic literature, where any miraculous healing becomes more impressive and more functional to the moral message contained in the anecdote if the cause of the illness is an evil spirit. In these cases, the protagonist is the saint, not the madman.[104] This for example can be seen in a passage from the thirteenth-century *Vita Prima Sancti Francesci*, by Tommaso da Celano. The saint is said to have healed a monk affected by what a modern reader would probably identify as epilepsy; the medieval author, however, insinuates that it might be a form of possession.

> Un frate subiva frequenti attacchi di un male gravissimo e orribile a vedersi che io non saprei neppure come chiamare, mentre alcuni pensano che si trattasse proprio del diavolo. Spesso infatti si gettava a terra e stralunando paurosamente gli occhi si ravvoltava tutto, rifacendo bava dalla bocca; le sue membra a volte si contraevano, a volte si distendevano, divenendo ora piegate e contorte, ora rigide e dure.[105]

> One of the brothers often suffered from a very serious illness, horrible to behold; I do not know how to name it, and some think it was the devil. He would often throw himself on the

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[103] Nikolaus Nösges, Horst Schneider (eds.), *Cesarius Von Heinsterbach, Dialogus Miraculorum, Dialog über die Wunder*, vol. III, Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, p. 990.

[104] For further information about exorcism as a means of enhancing the holy man's sanctity see Marek Tamm, "Saints and the Demoniacs: Exorcistic Rites in Medieval Europe (11th–13th Century)", *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 23, 2003, pp. 7 - 24.

[105] Tommaso da Celano, *Le due vite di San Francesco d'Assisi*, Roma: Angelo Signorelli Editore, 1904, pp. 92.

ground, with eyes so wide that they gave him a frightening expression, and he would turn about and foam at the mouth; at times his limbs were contracted, at other times they were relaxed; sometimes they were bent and twisted, other times rigid and hard. (translation mine)

In chivalric romance, the necessity of exalting the spiritual danger of the situation is not so pronounced as in hagiographic literature. Besides, the knight's insanity represents an important element in a strong narrative structure; consequently in order to be developed, the plot requires an active protagonist, even though his actions are totally irrational or limited to escaping from the court. In the hagiographic examples, the possessed is generally no less passive than the other infirm characters healed by the saint; the demonic presence is aimed more at underlining the seriousness of the situation than to create a different narrative pattern. These might be some of the reasons why the protagonist's madness in chivalric romance is not explicitly defined as a demonic possession.

It is therefore evident that these episodes of madness could evoke in the mind of the readers the many cases of demonic possession, although some important differences can be noted. Associating this madness to possession certainly had the advantage of recalling a canon; in this way, the audience might have been invited to reflect on the moral implications of this kind of madness without inserting didactic passages in the narration. On the other hand, an explicit identification between these heroes and the possessed sinner would probably have represented a too negative connotation for the Arthurian knight, especially in the case of Lancelot, who will be one of the questers of the Holy Grail. This hypothesis seems confirmed by the fact that Malory actually eliminates any reference to demonic possession in the story of Lancelot; he simply states that the knight was healed in the presence of the Grail (MDA 610). While in the French text, the Grail is strongly associated with religious values, in the Middle English version, at least in this episode, the relic has simply the function of a magic object, just

like the magic oil in *Ywain and Gawain*.

3.1.2 Phrenitis (frenesia) and Lethargy

According to Bartholomeus Anglicus, phrenitis manifests itself in those who have a hot and dry complexion, and it is caused by an excess of bile which heats the blood.

> Frenesy haþ þis name freneis of frenes "fellis" þat biclippiþ þe brayne and comeþ in tweye maners: oþir of rede colera ichaufed and irauyschid vpward by veynes, synewis, woosen, and pipes, and igedrid to a posteme, and so into þe kynde of frenesy; ouþir it comeþ of fumosite and smoke þat comeþ vpward to þe brayn and disturbliþ þe brayn, and hatte parafrenesis nouȝt verrey frenesy'.[106]

Some of the most evident symptoms are violent and prolonged fevers, acceleration of the heartbeat and a formidable thirst which causes the tongue to become black. In addition, the skin turns yellow and the madman has bloodshot eyes.[107] Insomnia seems to be another common symptom for those who are affected by this kind of madness. Even though Lancelot and the others do not suffer from any of these physical symptoms, they manifest some of the attitudes generally associated with phrenitis. The patient who suffers from this illness, for example, is often irascible and easily becomes furious.[108] Moreover, phrenitis seems to cause restlessness and aggressiveness: the patient often tries to attack those who look after him and to hit them. Sometimes they might also turn this aggressiveness against themselves. The already mentioned *Breviarium Praticae Medicinae* provides an interesting description of this tendency to aggressiveness and self-destruction.

> Aliquando fugit eger furiosus de lecto volens astantes percutere, vel volens se de fenestra iactare, vel capere arma.[109]

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[106] M. C. Seymour, Gabriel M. Liegey, and others (eds), *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, vol. I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 348.

[107] Faye Marie Getz (ed.), *Healing and Society in Medieval England: a Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, pp. 10-11.

[108] Paul Kaiser (ed.), *Hildegardis Causae et Curae*, Lipsia: Teubner, 1903, p. 56.

[109] Arnau de Vilanova, *Breviarium Praticae Medicinae*, Venice: Battista de Tortis, 1494, fol. 64r.

Sometimes, the frantic patient flees from his bed and wants to strike any bystander, or sometimes he wishes to throw himself out of the window, or get hold of a weapon. (translation mine)

Lancelot and the other knights attack nearly all those they meet. In addition, in his grief, Lancelot disfigures himself, launching himself through the window into a garden where he gets "to-cracced of hys visage and hys body" with the thorns (MDA 594). This could be a way to describe excessive sorrow, as happens in *Sir Orfeo*. After waking up from the magic dream where the King of the Fairies announces that she will join him in his reign, Dame Herodis is said to weep incessantly, to scream and to try to scratch her white skin (SO 7-8; lines 77-82). When her husband enquires after her conduct, she gives a detailed and clear explanation (SO 12-16; lines 133-174). If we decide, as the narrator of the lay suggests, that she is not mad, we need therefore to attribute her attitude to a conventional expression of sorrow, and Lancelot's launching himself through the window might just have the same function. It is nevertheless interesting that his reaction should correspond exactly to the behaviour described in the Salernitan text.

Despite this common tendency to aggressiveness and self destruction, phrenitis does not seem the main source for these heroes' madness. These symptoms are common to other kinds of mental illness, such as *mania* for example. Similarly, another widely studied illness, lethargy, shows some traits which were present also in the knights' madness in the wood although it seems quite clear that the author did not have this illness in mind.

Lethargy, caused by the abundance of phlegm, is characterised by a continuous fever, and prolonged periods of immobility;[110] none of the mad knights experiences this. However, among the symptoms of lethargy there is also the inability to answer questions, which might be evoked by the description of mad Lancelot as "a mute beast"

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[110] *Breviarium Praticae Medicinae*, fol. 65r.

(FL 36), and amnesia, which affects all these madmen. This lack of memory is also functional to justify the long periods during which they wander, even among well known people and places, as happens to Lancelot at King Pelles' court, without recognising them and without being recognised. In addition, Lancelot's skin is said to be tanned by the sun (FL 36) and lethargy was believed to cause a darkening in the colour of the skin.[111] Naturally, this last detail could have been inserted for other reasons; it could for example indicate that the protagonist has lost his noble aspect and beauty, which the canons of the time linked to a fair skin or, once again, it might provide an additional reason for the fact that the hero is not recognised. A dark skin was also believed to be one of the characteristics of the devil.[112] Hence this detail might have increased the sense of fear that the image of these knights evoked in the other characters and in the audience's mind, and have provided the protagonists with further occasions of being comically mistaken for something dangerous and supernatural.

3.1.3 Melancholy and Amor Heroicus

Melancholy probably was the dysfunction with which even non-medical readers were most familiar, as its characteristics were described in literary works and even in songs. This is what a popular lyric says about the melancholic complexion.

> Ynvyws, dysseuabyll, my sckynys roghe;
> owtrage in exspence, hardy y-noghe;
> suttyll & sklendyr, hote and dry,
> of collour pale, my nam is malencolly. [113]

Even though the members of the audience might not have a medical notion of melancholy, they probably had a very specific picture of the symptoms of illness; as can

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[111] Vincentius Bellovacensis, *Speculum Doctrinale*, 1624, Reprint, Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1965, p. 1315.

[112] Jeffrey Russell, p. 46.

[113] Rossell Hope Robbins (ed.) *Secular Lyrics of 14. and 15. Centuries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955, p. 72.

be seen from these lines, the main traits of the melancholic are thinness (suttyll & sklendyr), a pale complexion (collour pale), and a sluggish and slow disposition (ynvyws, dysseuabyll).

More than a real mental illness, melancholy was supposed to be a state of the body in which the black bile – one of the four humours contained in the body according to medieval medicine – was not in balance with the other humours. To a certain extent, this imbalance could simply mean a predisposition towards a certain character, but when it surpassed the normal physiological levels, it could result in a sickness which affected the person's mind as well.

> If þis humour haue maistrye in any body, þyse beþ þe signes and tokens. First þe colour of þe skyn chaungiþ into þe blake or into bloo colour; sour sauour [and] sharp and erþey is ifeled in þe mouþ by þe qualite of þe humour; þe pacient is faynt and ferdful in herte without cause. Galien seiþ if þe dredes of suche endure withouten cause, his passioun is melancholia. And also al þat haþ þis passioun wiþouten cause beþ often dredeful and sory, and þat for þe melancholif humour constreyneþ and closiþ þe herte. And so if men askeþ of suche what þey drede and wherefore þei beþ sory, þey haueþ none answere. Somme drediþ enemyte of so moon. Som loueþ and desireþ deþ.[114]

Some of the symptoms listed above, like faintness, depression, and desire of death, are characteristic also of love-sickness, also called *Amor Heroicus* or *erotomania*. Hence, these two forms of illness were often perceived as correlated, especially in courtly literature and popular belief. The audience of Arthurian romances was probably more familiar with courtly love literature than with specific medical texts, hence, love-sickness and melancholy will be here treated in the same section.

Since Lancelot's madness is strictly connected with his love for his lady, as happens also for the other knights, the association with love sickness arises naturally. Even though the circumstances are different, in all cases the knights are somehow refused by their lovers: Lancelot is unjustly rebuked by the queen; Ywain is explicitly repudiated by his wife (YG 43-44, lines 1597-1628) and Tristan leaves King Mark's

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[114] *On the Property of Things,* vol I, p. 161.

court because he believes Yseulde has betrayed him with Sir Kahedin (MDA 367). These Arthurian knights are apparently on the same level as the other literary courtly lovers who have been refused by their beloved ones, or who are separated from their ladies, and thus fall into a love-sickness which resembles madness. There is however at least one important exception. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, Merlin becomes a wild madman after losing his mind because of the death of his brothers in battle (DM 60). Even though the element which causes his madness is a loss in the sphere of affections, the protagonist does not go insane because of his unhappy or unfulfilled love for a lady. On the contrary, in his madness, Merlin refuses his marriage and even gives his permission to his wife to marry a second time. The fact that madness here is not associated with love suggests that it might constitute a *topos* not necessarily related to the courtly love tradition or even to love-sickness. Nevertheless, since the other episodes of wild madness belong to the courtly love tradition, it is worth analysing whether there may be any coinciding aspects or influences between these two illnesses.

A clear description of love-sickness and its symptoms can be found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. As soon as he sees Criseyde, Troilus is struck by a violent love-sickness in Book I. Moreover, in the second part of the poem, after the departure of the lady, Troilus falls back into his melancholic state and is said to grow weak until he can walk only with crutches:

> And fro this forth tho refte hym love his slep,
> And made his mete his foo, and ek his sorwe
> Gan multiplie, that, whoso tok kep,
> It shewed in his hewe both eve and morwe
> Therfor a title he gan him for to borwe
> Of other siknesse, lest men of hym wende
> That the hote fir of love hym brende
> Ad seyde he hadde a fevere and ferde amys. (RC 480; book I, lines 484-491)
>
> He ne et ne drank, for his malencolye,
> And ek from every compaignye he fledde;
> This was the lif that al the tyme he ledde.
> He so defet was, that no manere man

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Unneth hym myghte knowen ther he wente;
So was he lene, and therto pale and wan,
And feble, that he walketh by potente (RC 576; book V, lines 1216-1222)

The main traits are therefore lack of sleep and of appetite, depression, feebleness, a pale complexion and the preference for loneliness. However, the distinguishing characteristic, at least for Chaucer, seems to be having love for a cause. Even though the symptoms are extremely evident, those who ignore the real reason of Troilus' sickness are apparently satisfied with his claim to have "a fevere."

As far as sleep is concerned, Lancelot and the other knights do not seem to be much affected in their madness. Nothing is said explicitly about refusing to sleep; on the contrary, both Lancelot and Ywain (MDA 609; YG 46; line 1709) are eventually recognised while sleeping. Even after the first fight in the forest, Lancelot enters the tent and falls asleep in his opponent's bed (MDA 605).

As we have already seen in the previous section, the mad knights do not seem able to provide themselves with sufficient food; nevertheless, when offered, they do not refuse it either, with the exception of Tristan, who does not eat the food brought by the damsel (MDA 369). Apart from Tristan, the mad knight apparently does not experience the suffering lover's fast. Finally, the melancholic lover often dwells in a state of apathy; this does not happen to Lancelot or the other madmen who, while in the wood, present an aggressive nature and attack any man they encounter. As Anne Hawkins observes,[115] this wild madness seems to correspond more to the description of *mania*, which will be investigated in the next section, than to melancholy.

However, these episodes of madness might have evoked in the mind of the medieval readers the idea of the traditional love sickness. The case of Tristan, as already mentioned, seems to be the closest to this category. His frenzy overcomes him in rather

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[115] Hawkins, p. 386.

a gradual way. After escaping from Tintagel, he flees to the wood, where he dwells until a lady finds him near her castle. Even though he refuses food, he is still rational enough to ask her to play his lays on the harp she has brought, and even plays one himself. Real wild madness strikes him after some days (MDA 369). What happens before the wild phase could be read as a traditional love sickness; the presence of both fasting and music seems to be rather indicative. Music was considered a good remedy for love-sickness; a couple of centuries later, music would be defined "the food of love" in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*;[116] it is therefore natural that an unhappy lover should find comfort in its practice. Moreover, music is the leitmotif of Tristan and Iseulde's romance, as the first attachment between the two young people is created while Tristan gives Iseulde harp lessons (MDA 288). Music was often used also to cure mad people, especially those who displayed a particularly aggressive behaviour. This can be found for instance in the *Vita Merlini*, where the mad protagonist is soothed with the sound of a *cythara* (DM 70). In Samuel I, 16:23 David delivers the king's soul from demons with his harp. The episode of Tristan in the forest might have activated all these echoes in the medieval mind, but love-sickness was probably the most evident, especially when we consider that, in the French version, it mirrors Iseulde's suffering when she believes Tristan to be dead. Before trying to kill herself, she starts refusing food and plays the harp incessantly in order to finish her lay for Tristan's death (CRT 223-229). After Tristan flees from the lady into the wood, however, he definitely seems more affected by *mania* than by *melancholy*. Melancholy followed by mania is, after all, what happens to Chaucer's Troilus as well. After realising that Cryseide has betrayed him, the young warrior is possessed by a sort of battle frenzy which eventually leads him to his death (RC 583-584; book V, lines 1751-1805). The actual symptoms are very different from

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[116] Keir Elam (ed.), *William Shakespeare, The Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2008, Act I, scene 1, lines 1-3.

those we have seen in the case of the other knights: Troilus' madness has no connection with any wild environment or animal-like behaviour; it simply consists in an implacable fury which allows him to kill many Greeks in battle and which is functional also to his own death. However, it is evident that in the medieval vision, mania, or anyway a violent form of madness, could be a consequence of melancholic love-sickness. Even medical authorities, such as Bartholomeus Anglicus[117] or the author of the *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*,[118] treated these two diseases in the same chapter of their works. The idea of love-sickness might have been evoked also in the cases of Lancelot and Ywain as an implicit phase preceding their wild madness; these episodes could also have presented a more gradual development, like Tristan's, in earlier sources, and were afterwards reduced only to the manic phase in the texts which have been preserved; it is possible that there was a melancholic phase which afterwards became implicit.

Moreover, let us not forget that in the *Roman de Tristan*, this episode of madness follows the description of Kahedin's suffering for Iseulde (CRT 138). Kahedin's love-sickness presents the usual pattern. Having no hope to be accepted by Iseulde he loses his appetite, refuses to sleep and nearly consumes himself to death. Since both author and audience had a very clear example of melancholic love-sickness, it is natural to think that it would have been more interesting to insert a different case of madness.

Another aspect which these knights do not have in common with traditional melancholy is meditation. According to Gilbertus Anglicus, the main symptoms of the melancholic dysfunction are sadness, fear of those things which should not be feared and the tendency to meditate on those subjects about which one should not meditate.[119] The same meditation characterises the sufferings of the lover and often generates a poetical expression of his desperate love, based on a very introspective point of view.

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[117] *On the Property of Things,* vol I*, pp. 159-162.
[118] *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*, fol. 15V-16v.
[119] *Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, p. 13.

The melancholic narrator of Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, for instance, seems

perfectly aware of his sufferings as well as their causes, and he meditates upon them.

> I have gret **wonder**, be this lyght,
> How that I lyve, for day ne nyght
> I may nat slepe wel nygh noght;
> I have so many an ydel **thought**
> Purely for defaute of slep
> That, by my trouthe, I take no kep
> Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth,
> Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth.
> Al is ylyche good to me -
> Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be -
> For I have **felynge** in nothyng,
> But as yt were a mased thyng,
> always in poynt to falle a-doun;
> For sorwful **ymagynacioun**
> Ys always hooly in my **mynde**.
> […]
> and thus melancolye
> And drede I have for to dye. (RC 330; lines 1-15; 23-24)

This does not happen for Lancelot and the others; once madness strikes them, they

simply cease to show any sign of introspection. They become like animals and are not

attributed any feeling or thought until they recover their sanity. This difference seems

underlined by the vocabulary used in the texts; while the narrator of *The Book of the*

Duchess expresses his sorrow with terms which belong to the sphere of imagination and

feeling, the madness of these knights generally presents verbs and nouns which indicate

active actions, as can be seen for instance in the case of Ywain.

> For wa he wex al wilde and wode.
> Unto the wod the way he **nome**;
> No man wist whore he bycome.
> Obout he **welk** in the forest,
> Als it wore a wilde beste;
> His men on ilka syde has soght
> Fer and nere and findes him noght.
> On a day als Ywayne **ran**
> In the wod, he met a man;
> Arowes brade and bow had he,
> And when Sir Ywayne gan him se,
> To him he **stirt** with bir ful grim,
> His bow and arwes **reft** he him.
> Ilka day than at the leste
> **Shot** he him a wilde beste;
> Fless he **wan** him ful gude wane,

And of his arows lost he nane. (YG 45; lines 1650-1666)

From the moment they lose their mind, the knights' tragedy is transferred to the other people in the community who mourn for their absence, feel pity when they recognise them in such conditions, fear them or find them interesting for their being something half-way between the civilised world and the natural wilderness.

3.1.4 Mania

Mania is provoked by an inflammation of the front ventricle of the brain. It presents symptoms similar to phrenitis's but, unlike phrenitis, it involves no fever and is chronic. Mania can be characterised by laughter, as can be found in Gilbertus Anglicus and in the *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*,[120] or by anger and violence, as described also in Bartholomeus Anglicus.[121]

Those affected by mania can also be subject to hallucinations and sexual excitement.[122] These details can be found in the descriptions of Lancelot's madness, as well as in the other heroes'. As already pointed out, these knights react violently and aggressively towards nearly anyone they encounter. Nothing is said explicitly about hallucinations, but it is clear that they sometimes mistake the intentions of those who approach them. Lancelot, for example, threatens and attacks the knight of the pavilion treating him like a dangerous enemy just when he is offering him hospitality (MDA 604). This probably had also the function of creating a comic contrast. In *Ysaÿe le Triste*,[123] for example, the mad protagonist mistakes his best friends for robbers who want to steal his food.

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[120] *Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, p. 13; *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*, fol. 16r.
[121] *On the property of things*, p.162.
[122] *Breviarium Medicinae Practicae*, fol. 16R; Salvatore Renzi (ed.), *Collectio Salernitana, Ossia Documenti Inediti e Trattati di Medicina Appartenenti alla Scuola Medica Salernitana*, vol II, Napoli: Filiatre-Sebezio, 1853, p. 660.
[123] André Giacchetti (ed.), *Ysaÿe le Triste*, Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1989, p. 150. Henceforth referred to as "YT"; page numbers will be inserted in the text.

There is no explicit mention about sexual excitement either, but, after he has struck the knight of the pavilion, Lancelot is said to reach the bed inside the tent and to lie near the knight's wife. This detail is present in the French *Folie* (FL 57), but it is maintained also in in Malory (MDA 605). The writers therefore attributed to this detail a certain importance. A noblewoman sleeping, although for a very brief time, with a wild fool probably had a comic connotation, but it might have been helpful to suggest a certain wilderness also in the sexual appetite of the hero. On the other hand, this is the only possible allusion to the sexuality of mad Lancelot, and nothing similar can be found in the other episodes of wild madness; there are therefore no certain elements to demonstrate that this detail might be alluding to this maniacal symptom.

Finally, the fashion in which Ywain is cured might suggest a correlation with *mania.* The lady instructs the maid to rub the knight's head with a magic oil given to her by Morgan le Fay (YG 48; lines 1752-1758; 1763-1768). This seems to indicate that the main cause of the hero's madness resides in his head and mania is due to an inflammation of the brain, as noted also by Anne Hawkins.[124] However, the servant maid tells her mistress that she has heard that sorrow can heat the blood in the body and provoke madness, and later disobeys her lady's orders by applying the ointment all over Ywain's body (YG 48; lines 1779-1782). This seems to suggest that the maiden believes Ywain to be affected by phrenitis, whose cause is a general inflammation of the blood. This might represent an intentional opposition between two medical currents or simply a casual insertion of everyday beliefs about madness. There might also be another possibility; the author might be here deriding these two women's attempt to deliver a diagnosis as if they were professional physicians. Although the lady and the maid are certainly positive figures, as they bring Ywain back to reason, they prove superficial and quite lacking in common sense. When the maiden realises that, contrary to her mistress'

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[124] Hawkins, p. 382.

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orders, she has used up all the magic oil, she throws the empty bottle in the river and tells the lady that she lost the remaining oil in the river when her horse suddenly stumbled. The lady seems perfectly convinced by this explanation and recognises that it would have been worse if the maid had fallen into the river (YG 49-50; lines 1834-1860). The maid is therefore presented as disobedient and insincere and the lady is easily manipulated by her servants; they are indeed the most unlikely physicians for a serious illness such as Ywain's madness.

One last aspect of mania needs to be explored. Some authors, like Bernard of Gordon,[125] observed a particular variant of this insanity which manifested itself with a particularly aggressive and animal-like attitude: the *mania demoniaca*. In the twelfth-century medical manual *Collectio Salernitana*, for example, we find a detailed description of this type of mania.

> Et habet quidem .ii. species, quarum una dicitur mania canina, et alia mania demoniaca. Mania autem canina habet rixam mixtam cum tripudio et amentia, aliquando admiscetur cum obedientia, sicut est videre in naturis canum. Mania vero demoniaca tota est rixa cum ferocitate […] Melancholia vero est cum timore et quiete, et in locis occultis habitantem; sed in mania est agitatio et saltus et lupinositas, et aspectus non similis aspectui hominis et audacia magna.[126]

> And it has two varieties, one which is called canine mania, and the other demoniacal mania. And canine mania consists of aggression mixed with agitated movements and dementia, and sometimes it's accompanied by docility, as is seen in the behaviour of dogs. Whereas demoniacal mania is total aggression with ferocity […]. For melancholy is accompanied by fear and passivity, and involves living in secluded places; but in mania there is agitation and leaping about and wolfishness, and an appearance that doesn't resemble that of a man, and great audacity.[127]

The main difference is that, while in the case of *mania canina* aggressiveness can be tamed into obedience, the patient affected by *mania demoniaca* is totally out of control, and dangerous and violent as can be a wolf. If Lancelot and the others had really suffered from this second kind of mania, probably they would not have been welcomed

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[125] Bernardus de Gordonio, *Opus Lilium Medicinae Inscriptum, De Morborum, Prope Omnium Curatione, Septem Particulis Distributum*, Lugduni: Gulielmum Rouillium, 1559, p. 205.

[126] *Collectio Salernitana*, vol. II, pp. 659-660.

[127] Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 190.

among other people, and certainly they would never have been appointed court fools. Considering the matter in medical terms, their insanity seems therefore to be of the *canine* type. Nevertheless, they present some characteristics of the *mania demoniaca*.

As mentioned above, the Arthurian mad knights basically behave like animals as far as food, environment in which they feel to belong, and relationships with the others are concerned, and, although they are always recognised as humans, their aspect is deeply altered. Moreover, these protagonists seem characterised by a great audacity, or disregard for their life, as can be seen for instance in Lancelot's episode with the boar, or Tristan's struggle with the giant (MDA 607; 372). Bartholomaeus Anglicus includes this kind of insanity in the category of melancholy, but it seems clear that he is referring to the same illness; moreover, he identifies it as Nebuchadnezzar's madness. As will be analysed in Chapter 6, the Babylonian king is believed to be one of the models for these mad knights.

> Melancolik men fallith into thise and many othir wondirful passiouns, as Galien seith and Aulisaundir and many other auctors, the which passiouns it were to longe to rekene al on rowe. And this we seeth alday with oure eiʒen, as it fel late of a nobleman that fel into such a madness of melancholie that he in alle wise trowed that he himsilf was a catte, and therefore he wolde nowhere reste but undir beddes there cattis waitid aftir myse. and in cas in wreche of his synnes nabugodonosor was ipunyschid with suche a peyne, for it is iwriten in stories tat seuen ʒere hym semed that he was a best thurouz diuers shappis: lyoun, egle, and ox.[128]

The identification of this insanity with a variant of melancholy, was probably quite popular as well, since we will still find it, much later, in *The Duchess of Malfi*. In the second scene of act V, Ferdinand's madness is explicitly defined as lycanthropy, and it is later explained that it is an extreme form of melancholy.

> In those that are possess'd with 't there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves;
> Steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
> One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane

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[128] *On the Property of Things*, p. 162.

Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully;
Said he was a wolf, only the difference
Was, a wolfs skin was hairy on the outside,
His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
Rip up his flesh, and try.[129]

The fact that this kind of madness could be seen also as a typology of melancholy further suggests that for the medieval readers it might have been associated also with the traditional love-sickness, which, as we have already seen, cannot be totally excluded from the analysis of these cases, even though it presents very different characteristics.

The occurrence of the themes of love, betrayal, and transformation into a wild being can be found also in the Breton *Lay de Melion* and in its most likely source, the lay of *Bisclavret*. Apparently, the story of Melion has little in common with the madness of the other Arthurian heroes. After marrying the only woman who declares she has not loved anyone else before him, one day Melion goes hunting with her and a squire. They spot a magnificent stag, and his wife claims that she will die if she does not eat the flesh of the animal. She then helps Melion to transform into a werewolf in order to kill the stag. After the transformation, the lady elopes with the squire and steals her husband's clothes and magic ring, thus preventing him from getting back to his human form. However, Melion is welcomed at King Arthur's court, after the king and his knights realise he is a wolf with "courtly manners", and eventually manages to denounce his wife's treason and to be turned back into a man.[130] Melion's situation is somehow opposed to Lancelot's and the other knight's: he suffers because he has been betrayed, not for something he has done, and while the other mad knights are human beings thinking and behaving like animals, he is an animal who thinks and acts like a man.

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[129] John Russell Brown (ed.), *John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, Act V, scene 2, lines 11-22.

[130] E. Margaret Grimes (ed.), *The Lays of Desiré, Graelent and Melion*, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1976, pp. 102-122.

Nevertheless, the presence of the same basic themes, although treated differently, seems to indicate a possible connection between Lancelot's madness, the *canine mania,* and the figure of the werewolf. Moreover, Sylvia Huot notes that the pattern of Lancelot's episode of madness is similar to that of Bisclavret's story, as they both experience first complete isolation and then a reintroduction into society, where they are the object of wonder.[131]

These mad knights present some traits which might recall some superstitious beliefs about madness and different typologies of mental illness at the same time. The general approach towards madness in these episodes seems therefore to mirror the common opinion of the time, according to which madness was always connected to the manifestation of the supernatural. These characteristics could have been simply well known symptoms of madness and might have been included by the authors simply to indicate the presence of a serious insanity, regardless of the medical theories of the time. There might also be an attempt to introduce in the story a new type of madness, not necessarily alien to the sufferings of love, but at the same time very different from the traditional melancholic love-sickness, of which romance literature already displayed a good amount of examples. Writers might also have inserted these medical details on purpose. Even though certainly not destined only to a medical audience, these works were probably written for an educated readership, which might have had some medical notions. This accumulation of symptoms of different diseases might have been inserted in order to create a hyperbolic madness, and this would certainly be in line with the exaggerated parameters of medieval romance. This intention might be somehow confirmed also by the *Chevalier au Lion*, where Ywain's madness is alternatively defined as "tempest" (CL 114; 120; lines 2808; 2954), "rage" (CL 120; 122 lines 2954;

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[131] Huot, p. 198.

2958; 3009) and once even "melancholy" (CL 122; line 3009). The terms used to describe the protagonist's madness seem aimed more to express the seriousness of the illness than to define its exact typology.

This presence of different symptoms and explicit characteristics might also, to some extent, imply a didactic intent: in the case of Ywain, the audience is told that some cases of mental illness must be healed applying the medicament only on the head and not all over the body (YG 48; lines 1779-1782); in the case of Tristan, one learns that a madman can be brought back to reason when properly fed and clothed, and that lack of food can aggravate insanity, as happens to Lancelot (MDA 373; 608). Another important inference is that the madman is not responsible, and not condemnable, for his actions. He is, on the contrary, to be welcomed and, if possible, cured. Only the unwise, such as shepherds or street boys, treat the madman like an animal. This is rather surprising, especially when we consider that this kind of madness could share some traits with demonic possession, and it could give us a new vision of how insane patients of the time were perceived.

3.2 Remedies for Madness and the Role of Women

Madness was a concern not only of the individual, but of the whole community as well, and so was its cure. Even when the knight is healed by means of a holy or magical object, it is always a member of that society that he has abandoned who performs the ritual; none of these heroes goes back to his senses after a divine intervention, as happened to Nebuchadnezzar. However serious and potentially connected with demonic possession, their madness is something which can be handled by humans.

Medieval remedies for mental illnesses could vary from what nowadays would be considered superstitious practices to more sensible solutions, such as interventions

on the patient's diet. However, although different categories of madness were identified, there was not a specific therapy for each of them. In the ninth-century collection of magical remedies *Bald's Leechbook*, the cure for the possessed is nearly the same used for madmen: a mixture of herbs and some prayers:

> Drenc wiþ feondseocum men of ciricbellan to drincanne. Gyþrife, glaes, gearwe, elethre, betonice, attorlaþe, cassuc, fane, finul, ciric ragu, cristes maeles ragu, lufestice. Gewyrc þone drenc of hlttrum ealađ, gesing{e} seofon maessan oofer þam wyrtum, do garleac and halig waeter to and drype on aelcne drincan þe he drincan wille eft. And sing{e} þone sealm *Beati immaculati*, *Ex<s>urgat* and *Salvum me fac Deus*, and þonne drince þone drenc circbellan and se maessepreost him singe aefter þam drence þis ofer, *Domine sancte Pater Omnipotens*.[132]

> Beverage for those possessed by the devil, to be drunken in a church bell. Take some corncockle, some bugloss, some yarrow, some lupin, some betony, some cockspur, some hair-grass, some iris, fennel, some lichens taken from a church, some lichens taken from a cross, some lovage. Prepare the beverage with some pale beer, sing seven masses over the plants, add some garlic and some holy water and put the potion in all the drinks he will drink from that moment on. Sing the psalm *Beati Immaculati*, the *Ex surgat* and *Salvum me fac Deus*. He should drink that beverage in a church bell and, after he has drunken, a priest should sing *Domine sancte Pater Omnipotens* over him. (translation mine)

> Wiþ weden heorte. bisceopwyrt, elehtre, banwyrt, eoforfearn, giþrife, heahhioloþe. þonne daeg scade and niht. þonne sing þu on ciricean Letanias, þaet is þara haligra naman, and *Pater noster*. Mid þy sange þu ga þaet þu sie aet þam wyrtum and þriwa ymbga. And þonne þu hie nime, gang eft to ciricean mid þy ilcan sange and gesing xii maessan ofer and ofer ealle þa drencan þe to þaere adle belimpaþ on weordmynde þara twelfa apostola.[133]

> Against madness: take some marsh mallow, some lupin, some daisies, some corncockle, some elecampane, when day and night are separated, sing some litanies in the church, sing those in the name of the saints, and the *Pater Noster*; still singing, go where these plants are situated and walk around them three times. When you will have taken them, go back into the church and accompany yourself with the same chanting, sing twelve masses in honour of the twelve apostles above the man and above the potions indicated for this illness. (translation mine)

Some of the plants listed above, such as bugloss (*gearwe*) and betony (*betonice*), have actually sedative effects. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that the aim of these potions was that of preventing the patient form harming himself or others. Other plants, like the corncockle (*gyþrife*), are actually poisonous; consequently these remedies sometimes probably caused more harm than benefits. Particularly interesting is the case

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[132] Anne Berthoin-Mathieu (ed.), *Prescriptions Magiques Anglaises du Xe au XIIe Siècle, Étude Structurale*, vol I, Paris: Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 1996, p. 62.

[133] *Prescriptions Magiques Anglaises du Xe au XIIe Siècle, Étude Structurale*, vol I, p. 64.

of the lupin (*elehtre*), which apparently was employed in all the recipes against madness or demonic possession. Lupin beans require a specific treatment before being eaten, otherwise they can be extremely toxic. Among the symptoms of lupin poisoning we find confusion, disorientation, difficulty in speaking. Moreover, those affected by this intoxication can also feel dizziness, stomach pains, and be extremely anxious.[134] Animal lupin intoxication is nowadays more frequent than human poisoning, consequently scientific documentation focuses more on animal cases. Animals affected by lupin poisoning seem to show a tendency to "wander aimlessly, push against objects and appear dizzy".[135] Some of these symptoms actually echo what happens to the wild knight. Lancelot and the others are evidently confused and disoriented during their madness, since they roam without a specific target and do not remember who they are. Moreover, they rarely talk and are undoubtedly restless. Making lupin beans edible requires a long procedure which involves boiling them and placing them in cold running water for one or two weeks, before boiling them again; this method is not mentioned in the magic prescriptions, and nothing is said about what quantity of each ingredient should be used. It is not unlikely that some attempts at preparing a beverage against madness might have ended in lupin poisoning, especially when considering that it is recommended to administer this potion every time the patient wants to drink. This kind of intoxication is naturally not the only possible justification for these episodes of madness, nor for the madman's symptoms, which, as already analysed, can be explained also in other ways. However, lupin poisoning could suggest an additional reason why all these episodes of madness show common symptoms; the effect of the intoxication probably looked like the aggravation of an illness by which the patient was already

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[134] Kirsten Pilegaard, Kirsten Pilegaard, Jørn Gry,Jørn Gry, et al., *Alkaloids in Edible Lupin Seeds: A Toxicological Review and Recommendations*, Copenaghen: Norden, 2008, pp. 61-62; J. K. Aronson, *Meyler's Side Effects of Herbal Medicines*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009, p. 125.

[135] L. Forero, G. Nader, et al., *Livestock-Poisoning Plants of California*, Berkeley: University of California ANR Publications, 2011, p. 28.

affected; when used for instance in a beverage to cure a melancholic madman, the sequence of reactions in the patient must have looked quite similar to what happens to Tristan or to Ywain, who lose their mind after a period of melancholy.

The idea that madness can be cured with potions or with herbal preparations is present both in *Ywain*, where Morgan's magic oil is said to be a remedy for insanity (YG 47; lines 1752-1758), and in *Partonope*. When Urake tells her sister that Partonope has gone mad, Melior affirms that she can prepare a potion to heal him (PB 316; lines 7879-7880). Herbal remedies, however, were not the only methods used by medieval physicians. Practitioners would actually choose different cures according to the position they adopted in the identification of the causes of one's madness. Those who saw in a humour dysfunction the main cause of the madness would for example try to counterbalance it by changing the patient's diet; those who believed insanity was caused by an emotional excess would suggest therapies aimed at relaxing the madman.[136] This lack of an official therapy for madness is not surprising. As Jeffrey Wigelsworth observes, medieval medicine was more art than science; the medical training of those who practised medicine in medieval villages was more often the result of an apprenticeship by the local healer than of university studies.[137] If a professional physician was not available, monks or clerics could provide assistance as healers. This can be seen for instance in all those cases where an Arthurian hero is wounded outside the court; if the hero is not destined to die, there generally happens to be a hermit nearby who heals him. When King Pellinor wounds Arthur in the wood, for example, Merlin takes him to a hermit not far away to have him cured (MDA 41). Similarly, when mad Lancelot is hurt by the boar, he is found by a hermit who offers to heal him (MDA 607).

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[136] Judith Silverman Neaman, *Suggestion of the Devil: the Origins of Madness*, New Yok: Anchor Books, 1975, p. 24.

[137] Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Science And Technology in Medieval European Life*, Westport: Greenwood, 2006, p. 113.

Women were not excluded from healing practices; accounts of old hags or wise women being summoned in desperate cases are not uncommon in popular folklore. Still in the early seventeenth century, Francis Kinaston reports a legend about the death of the Scottish author Robert Henryson. The dying man gave a witty reply to the prescription of the local witch, who had been called when the physicians had declared that there was nothing else to be done.[138] Women could act as healers also without being necessarily seen as witches; on the contrary, one of the most popular manuals of practical medicine was the already mentioned *Causae et curae*, by the Benedectine abbess Hildegard von Bingen, who was celebrated as a saint. Moreover, it seems that by the twelfth century, in some European cities, lay women were allowed to practice legally as professional physicians as well.[139] Female healers are not uncommon also in courtly literature as well. In the Anglo-Normal lay *Le deux Amants*, a young princess seeks the help of her Salernitan aunt, who has a vast knowledge in medicine, in order to help her suitor to succeed in the trial her father has imposed as condition in order to marry the princess (lines 95-108).[140] In addition, let us not forget that in the legend of *Tristan and Iseult*, Tristan's poisonous wound, given to him by Morholt, is healed only thank to Iseult's cures. In Malory, she is portrayed as having the skills of a professional physician to the point that she is defined "a noble surgeon".

> Than the kynge for grete favour mad Tramtryste to be put in his doughtyrs awarde and kepyng, because she was a noble surgeon. And whan she had serched hym she founde in the bottom of his wounde that therein was poyson, and so she healed hym in a whyle. (MDA 288)

Female characters play an important role also in these episodes of madness: apart from being the direct cause of the protagonist's insanity, they are often connected

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[138] Marshall W. Stearns, *Henryson*, Newyark: Columbia University Press, 1949, p. 9-10.
[139] Debra Stoudt, "Medieval German Women and the Power of Healing", Lilian R. Furst (ed.), *Women Healers and Physicians: Climbing a Long Hill*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997, pp. 13-42; p. 14.
[140] Philippe Walter (ed.), *Marie de France, Lais,* Saint-Amand: Gallimard, 2000, p. 212.

with his healing as well. Ywain is brought back to sanity entirely by women; he is found by women, the necessity to heal him is discussed among women, it is a woman who gives the order and the instructions to cure him; he is massaged with the magic oil by a woman, and finally it was a woman who prepared the magic oil. It is significant that where the hermit, who as we have seen could have acted as a healer, only feeds him, the women succeed in curing his madness. Ywain's is probably the most "feminist" healing, but also in the case of Lancelot it is the presence of Elaine which allows the hero to be recognised and consequently cured. Similarly, Tristan, even if not healed explicitly by a woman, is looked after by Palamedes' servant maid during his melancholic phase. Partonope is found and brought back to health by Urake, Melior's sister. Whatever the specific reason for the hero's madness, since its origins are linked with a woman, so is the cure. This seems to be confirmed also by the interesting case of *Ysaÿe le Triste*. Here the protagonist experiences exactly this wild madness, but the major cause is not the rebuke or anger of his lady, but the abduction of his page and best friend, the deformed dwarf Tronc. However, when the dwarf manages to regain his freedom and to find his master, it is he who heals Ysaÿe with a magic oil and a magic ring (YT 224). The work is rather late (fifteenth century) and is set in a world where the hero is the last representative of old chivalry and its values, which have been neglected after the fall of king Arthur and the death of all the other knights of the round table. In some passages, the author of the work might have meant to satirize some *topoi* of a genre which had been already over-exploited, and the hero's losing his mind for the loss of his ugly companion could constitute an example of this satirical approach, especially when we consider that in order to heal his master the dwarf uses a comic superabundance of magic objects. However, even if the writer's aim was to produce a comic effect, he seems to have taken for granted that the cause of madness and its cure should be linked.

This circularity is present, even if in a less evident fashion, also in the case of Tristan, who regains his sanity only when he is brought back to Tintagel, from which he had parted just before the beginning of his mental decline (MDA 368; 373). Also the way he is cured suggests that what he needs is a reconciliation with the civilised environment he has left rather than with his lady. His healing consists merely in warm clothes and "hot supynges" which restore him to that physical health which he had lost during his melancholic phase and which he had not managed to regain during his wild state.

This cure is not sufficient for Lancelot, who is well fed and properly dressed also in Blyaunte's castle (MDA 606), but who is not restored to sanity until he meets Elaine (MDA 609-610). Since Lancelot is the best knight in the world, he could not be healed by anything less than the most sacred relic of Christianity, which, besides, is guarded by Elaine's father. Similarly, Ywain, even though he does not reach the excellence of Lancelot, is among the bravest and most skilled knights of Camelot and therefore deserves to be cured with something which, although not the Holy Grail, is anyway special and unique. Moreover, the magic oil made by Morgan the Fay is made even more precious by the fact that the maid uses it all up, thus losing it forever and conferring Ywain the privilege of being the only human to have been cured by it. Actually, he is not healed by Alundyne, but the lady who finds him and the maid who actually heal him are a perfect equivalent of Alundyne and Lunette. In both cases, the maid seems to have a strong influence on her mistress and a more practical mind. It is Lunette who, at the beginning of the poem, convinces Alundyne to accept Ywain's love on the basis that she and her people need a protector (YG 26; lines 940-958). The anonymous maid will use the same argument in order to convince her lady to look after Ywain (YG 47; lines 1733-1746). In addition, after healing Ywain, the maid cheats on her mistress about the bottle of oil saying that it fell in the river and omitting to say that

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it was already empty (YG 50; lines 1844-1854); she therefore uses only the useful aspect of truth, as does Lunette when she reminds Alundyne of her promise to help the knight who had saved her faithful maid, that is to say Ywain *incognito*, to win back his lady's love thus compelling her to forgive the hero (YG 104; lines 3913-3922). These two pairs of women seem therefore linked by a chiasmic correspondence. This has also the effect of underlining the importance of this central episode of madness, after which a new chapter in the life of the hero begins. The fact that he is not healed directly by his lady is probably functional to the development of the story. In this way, the reconciliation with his wife is placed as the ultimate happy ending of the story and it is presented as the hero's utmost aspiration in all the second part of the poem and the reason why he accomplishes all those noble deeds which will eventually make him worthy to be forgiven by Alundyne. Similarly, Partonope is brought back to health and to sanity not by Melior herself, but by Urake, and he will not actually be completely forgiven by his lady until the end of the poem. Partonope's madness does not radically alter his personality as happens to the other heroes – he for instance maintains the faculty to communicate – therefore his return to sanity is not so dramatic as it is for the other madmen. However, after meeting Urake, he gives up his suicidal and consequently sinful project to have himself killed by the wild animals and begins caring again about his life to the point that he swears eternal gratitude to Urake who has saved him for the second time (PB 296; lines 7483-7495). Moreover, an unintentional intervention of Melior - who, as mentioned above, is actually able to prepare a medicine to cure madness (PB 316; lines 7879-7880) - could be seen in the fact that Partonope accepts to be helped only when Urake tells him a false story about Melior having forgiven him.

Therefore, the lack of a canonical and universal method to cure madness here surprisingly does not lead to the exile of the madman as a repulsive sinner. On the

contrary, when found by people capable of resisting their attacks, these knights receive attentions even when their identity is unknown. Sometimes, the simple fact of being looked after is sufficient to bring the hero back to sanity, as happens to Tristan or to Partonope; when it is not, the authors seize the possibility of inserting an element of wonder, such as the Holy Grail or the magic object, but an attempt to heal the madman is always made. Moreover, there seems to be a correlation between the cause of the hero's insanity and its cure; as this kind of madness is linked to the hero's love relationship, often this implies the actions of women. The female figures present in these works are thus not limited to passive ladies who need to be guided and defended or to negative seductresses, but include also positive and at the same time independent characters who act in the story in a more significant fashion than we expect.

4
Madness and its Causes

So far, madness has been analysed in terms of symptoms displayed and of physical causes which might lead to a specific illness. In this chapter, the possible emotional and ideological causes for this wild insanity will be investigated.

As analysed in the previous section, in some cases the protagonist loses his sanity in a more gradual way and the medieval audience might have been acquainted with some portions of text now lost describing the intermediate stages of the hero's madness; however, the general impression is that these knights become mad in a very short time, more as a consequence of a particular action or event rather than after a prolonged process. It is also clear that the original cause of insanity is not something merely physical. In his encyclopedic work, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, Bartholomaeus Anglicus speaks about madness and its causes.

> Deuteronomii xxviii: oure lord **schal smyte þee wiþ woodnes and lost of witte** and of mynde and wiþ stonynges, et cetera.
>
> [de amencia] And þese passiouns comeþ somtyme of passiouns of the soule, as of **besynes**, and grete þouʒtes of **sorwe**, and of **grete studie**, and of **drede**; sometyme of þe **bitinge** of a **wode hound** oþir of some oþir **venemous best**; sometyme of **corrupte** and **pestilente aier** þat is infect; somtyme of malis of **corrupt humour** þat haþ þe maystrie of þe body of a man to brede such a sikenes.[141]

Bartholomaeus here exemplifies the medieval approach towards madness. Once a physical cause (such as the bite of a rabid dog, or of a poisonous beast, or corrupt air or humour) was excluded, madness could be attributed either to divine intervention or to some emotional excess.

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[141] M. C. Seymour, Gabriel M. Liegey, and others (eds), *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, vol. I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 348; 350.

4.1 Divine Intervention

Divine punishment was one of the most popular interpretations for mental illnesses;[142] the most famous antecedent was the Biblical episode of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who was punished for his pride with seven years of madness. This figure will be analysed in the following chapter, but it is not the only medieval example of sin punished with madness. In the tenth-century Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*, the madness of Suibhne, the protagonist loses his mind because he has thrown a psalter into the lake (DM 206-209). In one of the *exempla* from the thirteenth-century collection *An Alphabet of Tales* by Étienne de Besançon, a monk falls into madness after surrendering to pride and lust.

> We rede how som tyme þer was a monke þat was of a grete abstinence & lay in a den, & fułł of vertues & gude liffyng. So on a tyme, be temptacion, he tuke a presumpcion & **þoght his holines come more of hym selfe þan of God**; [and] þe devułł on ane evynyng fenyd hym selfe in lyknes of a womman goand wyłł in þe wyldernes, and come vnto his den dure, & callid & said sho was a wery womman & had gane wiłł, & sett hur down on hur kneis & besoght hym to hafe mercie on hur. [...] So þis monke was so attempyd with hur, þat he rase & **tuke hur in his armys & hawsid hur, & þoght to hafe done his luste & his lykyng with hur** [...] And þan **þis monk fełł into a despayr, & was nere-hand evyn wude**, & gaff hym selfe vnto ałł vnclennes & syn, & efterward dyed in wykkid lyffyng. et c.[143]

In these examples, it is very clear which sin is punished. This is much less evident in the case of Lancelot and the other heroes. Their madness certainly is connected to a specific episode, but it is not always clear why they should be punished. Ywain's case is probably the most simple: having broken the word given to his wife Laudine, he is repudiated by her and goes mad with grief (YG 44-45; lines 1637-1650). However, the immediate punishment for his actions is his wife's forsaking and madness comes only afterwards. Lancelot's story follows a similar pattern: after sleeping with Elaine, he is rebuked by the queen, who wishes to see him no more; madness seizes him after

[142] Lillian Feder, *Madness in Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 101.

[143] Mary Macleod Banks (ed.), *Étienne de Besançon - An Alphabet of Tales: an English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum of Étienne de Besançon, from Additional Ms 25719 of the British Museum*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1904, pp. 90-91.

Guinevere's hard reproach (MDA 594). As for Ywain, the most evident punishment for the knight's actions seems to be the lady's reaction, more than madness. Insanity is here more a consequence of being separated from the lover. Besides, in the case of Tristan, the hero does not betray his lover, nor does he disobey some pre-established rule in their relationship; the reason of their quarrel and subsequent separation is just a misunderstanding, but no apparent sin has been by Tristan.

In another *exemplum* by Étienne de Besançon, a sick monk refuses to eat the meat prescribed by his abbot; hence, God punishes him with madness. The mad monk, after escaping into the wilderness, finds a dead dog and eats its meat:

> Cesarius tellis how som tyme Þer was ane abbot & he had a seke monke. And he saw Þat it was necessarie to hym to eate flessh, & he **commandid hym Þat he suld eate flessh; and he was passand swaymos & wold nott.** And for als mekutt as **God wolde shew Þat obediens war better Þan meat or drynk**, Þis inobedient monke onone **turnyd into a wudenes**, **and ran wude into Þe felde**. And Þer fande a dead dogg & **att Þe flessh** on hym stynkid, and he fett to and ete of hym gredelie. And Þus because he truspasid in flessh & wolde not eat flessh when his abbott bad hym, Þerfor he was punissid in flessh-etyng, et c', for his inobedyance.[144]

Once again the correlation between the monk's fault and his punishment is evident; it is even explicitly explained in the *moralitas* of the story. On the other hand, no moral explanation is given for the wild madness of the Arthurian knights, and consequently it is not clear which moral teaching these episodes might contain. Ywain might deserve to be punished for breaking a promise but had the hero abandoned the court to go back to his wife, he would have achieved no glory or honours (YG 42-43; lines 1561-1576) and would probably have displeased his sovereign as well. Partonope disobeys the commandments of his mysterious mistress, but he is eventually convinced to do so by a bishop (PB 216-220; lines 5678-5695). Had Ywain left the royal court against the king's desire, or had Partonope ignored the bishop's advice, the deriving sorrow and dishonour would probably have been even greater. From the protagonist's point of view, the fault

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[144] *An Alphabet of Tales*, p. 452.

he commits is the lesser of two evils. Finally, Lancelot's sleeping with Elaine is unintentional, since he thinks Elaine is Guinevere (MDA 593).

Étienne de Besançon points out that the monk's madness mirrors the sin he had committed: he was unwilling to eat the meat necessary to his health and was punished not only with the aggravation of his illness but also with the mad action of eating rotten dog meat. Once again, in the case of the mad knight this correlation is much less explicit, if not absent. The only possible parallel between their faults and their wild madness is that all these knights have somehow betrayed their lovers and are consequently transformed into something which shares some of the characteristics of the dog, symbol of loyalty; these madmen show no hesitation in protecting those who feed them, as happens for Lancelot when sir Blyaunte is attacked (MDA 606) or to Tristan when he defends the shepherds (MDA 371). In turn, the other members of society often treat these mad knights like domestic animals; for example, at King Pelles' court many throw food to Lancelot, but few dare bring it to his hands (MDA 608). The association with the dog might be supported also by a passage from the *Tristano Panciatichiano*, a fourteenth-century Tuscan rendition of the *Roman de Tristan en Prose.* The shepherds with whom Tristan dwells in the forest are attacked by lions and Tristan saves one of their dogs, who becomes his companion.[145] Moreover, the presence of canine traits in these madmen's attitudes would square with some of the symptoms of demoniacal mania or of licanthropy, one of the possible models for this madness.[146] This interpretation is not impossible, but it seems strange that the moral message should be openly explained in none of the texts. The only trace of a moral lesson could be seen in the scene where Lancelot goes back to court after his madness; when king Arthur asks further details about the cause of his madness, the knight dismissively replies that he

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[145] Gloria Allaire (ed.), *Il Tristano Panciatichiano*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, p. 310.
[146] See Chapter 3.

had what he sowed (MDA 617). His statement, however, remains very ambiguous, something quite unusual for a moral explanation, and might be simply aimed at reconciling himself with the queen, despite the presence of her husband.

The moral explanation is generally present not only in religious and secular *exempla,* but also in other Arthurian tales. The moral lesson is generally provided by a hermit or by a wise man who happens to be providentially available when any Arthurian knight experiences something inexplicable. In *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, for example, Gawain and Ector have strange dreams while sleeping in a chapel. When they wake up, they look for a hermit and soon find one, who interprets their dreams (MDA 680-686). The hermits present in these episodes of madness, on the other hand, never try to explain what has happened to the knight or to express a moral judgement about the protagonist's insanity.

This seems to suggest that sudden madness was not always felt as a direct consequence of a crime or a sin; this is apparently confirmed by the fact that the mad knights are generally more pitied than condemned by those who recognise them. In the *Folie Lancelot*, for example, when the hero is recognised in the community of hermits, none of them speculates that he might have been punished with madness for a crime or a sin (FL 44-45). A further evidence that this madness was not necessarily a form of punishment can be found in the story of Ywain. In the French version, when the ladies find him asleep, one of them says:

> Dame, je ay Yvain trové,
> Le chevalier mialz esprové
> Del monde et mialz antechié;
> Mais je **ne sai par quel pechié**
> Est au franc honme mescheü;
> Espoir aucun **duel** a eü
> Qui le fait ainsi demener;
> C'on puet bien de **duel** forsener (CL 118-120; lines 2925-2932)

> My lady, I have found Yvain, the most accomplished knight in the world and the most virtuous; but I do not know what misfortune has befallen the noble man: perhaps some grief

has caused him to behave in this manner; one can certainly go mad with grief. (CL 119-121)

The Old French word "pechié" can indicate a misfortune but also a sin. The maid therefore does not exclude the possibility of a divine punishment for some sin, but at the same time she states twice that madness could be the result of grief. Interestingly, in the Middle English translation, only sorrow is mentioned as a possible cause of madness.

> "Madame," sho said, "for sertayn,
> Here have we funden Sir Ywayne,
> The best knyght that on grund mai ga.
> Allas, him es bytid so wa;
> In sum **sorow** was he stad,
> And tharfore es he waxen mad.
> **Sorow** wil meng a mans blode
> And make him forto wax wode". (YG 47; lines 1733-1740)

In the Middle Ages, excessive sorrow was considered a form of sin. This is explicitly said for example in the *Prose Merlin*. When the future mother of Merlin visits her confessor, he advises her never to surrender to desperation, which is sinful and exposes man to the power of Satan (PM 21). Nevertheless, there is no mention of this in these episodes. Besides, both Guinevere's and Isolde's reaction to the separation from their lovers is equally tragic, as will be analysed in the following section, but it does not end in madness.

When madness was not a punishment for one's faults, it could be a divine monitory for someone who needed to change his or her sinful life. Once healed, sinners would realise the immorality of their conduct and redeem themselves. The most exemplary antecedent in this case is probably the story of Mary Magdalene. In the Gospel, she is said to join Jesus after being healed from the "seven demons" (Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9). Moreover, Gregory the Great in his *Homilies on Luke's Gospel*[147] established the association between Mary Magdalene and the "sinful woman" who

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[147] Giuseppe Cremascoli (ed.) *San Gregorio Magno, Omelie sui Vangeli*, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1994, pp. 422-424.

washes Christ's feet in Luke 7: 35-38 and John 11: 2, According to Gregory, "sinful woman" indicated that she was a prostitute. To the medieval readership therefore, Mary Magdalene's case constituted an excellent example of how a sinful life could lead to possession, which was strictly connected with madness,[148] and how healing from possession and madness could bring along repentance and redemption. Besides, according to medieval hagiography,[149] Magdalene ended her days as a hermit in the wilderness.

Mary Magdalene, however, is not the only case where redemption and wilderness after a period of insanity are associated. In the French romance *Le Chevalier au Barisel*, the cruel protagonist is condemned to a wild and roaming life until he repents.[150] Episodes of divine monitory can be found also *Le Morte Darthur*; in the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, Lancelot is unable to approach the Grail and becomes paralysed for twenty-four days, something which he later interprets as a punishment of his twenty-four years as a sinner (MDA 727-728).

In the examples mentioned above, the divine monitory is followed by the repentance of the sinner and by the intent, even though sometimes only temporary, to change life. However, none of the mad knights manifests the intention of altering his existence after his experience. Lancelot, for example, does not give up his love for Guinevere on this occasion; he remains separated from her just because he believes his madness has dishonoured him and he is too ashamed to return to King Arthur's court. Similarly, Tristan does not avoid Iseulde; he initially tries to remain incognito only to keep the queen and himself safe from the king's anger (MDA 374-375). Finally, Ywain does not cease to seek glory and honour, to the point that the second part of the book

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[148] See Chapter 3.
[149] For further information about the medieval legends concering Mary Magdalen, see Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
[150] Franco Romanelli (ed.), *Il Cavaliere e l'Eremita (Le Chevalier au Barisel)*, Parma: Pratiche Editrice, 1987, pp. 48-70.

focuses only on his adventures after he has recovered from insanity. Moreover, when restored to sanity, these heroes are totally oblivious of what has happened to them during their madness.

Even though madness probably does not represent a monitory for the knight, the admonition against a wrong conduct might be meant for the audience. Whatever the precise reason why these heroes lose their mind, none of the readers would feel encouraged to break his vows to his lady, or to betray her to another woman, or to accuse her unjustly. However, as for the divine punishment, to explain these episodes of madness on the base of this interpretation alone would be reductive.

4.2 Grief, Dishonour and Courtly Love

Since divine intervention seems to be absent in these episodes, the most immediate and convincing reason for the knight's madness is the grief deriving from the forsaking of the lover. Insanity caused by grief is not a prerogative of courtly lovers only. As already mentioned, in the *Vita Merlini* (DM 60), the sorrow which causes the protagonist's madness derives from the loss of his brothers and not from any misunderstanding with his lady. A parallel case of madness due to grief might be found in Boccaccio's *Tale of Beritola* from the *Decameron*.[151]

Beritola is the virtuous and noble wife of the Neapolitan Arrighetto Capece, a supporter of the Sicilian king Manfredi. When the latter is defeated and killed in the battle of Benevento, Arrighetto is captured by the troops of Charles I, and Beritola tries to return to Naples. Unfortunately, she is shipwrecked on the island of Ponza together with her two sons, who are later kidnapped by pirates. Finding herself alone on the island, she is initially overcome with sorrow but then finds a partial consolation in

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[151] For further information about Beritola's "wilderness", see Christopher Nissen, "Hagiographic Romance and the Wild Life in Boccaccio's Novella of Beritola (Decameron II, 6)", *Italica,* 88, 2011, pp. 515-537.

breasting a pair of newborn roedeers and adopting them and their mother as her new family. She survives on the island drinking water and eating grass and when she is found by a passing ship, she is said to have become wild, dark and hairy; she even carries a club to protect the members of her new family. She is later brought back into civilisation and is eventually reunited to her husband and her sons.[152] Here the circumstances are quite different from what happens to Merlin, but in both cases insanity is due to a concrete loss of someone rather than to a repudiation on the part of the lover. However, both Merlin and Beritola react to a dramatic event with madness[153] and animal-like behaviour, like Lancelot and the other Arthurian knights.

Madness somehow linked to the sorrow for someone's death can be found also in a short retelling of the legend of Nebuchadnezzar. In the Middle English lay *Robert of Cisyle*, the proud king Robert is punished by an angel and degraded to the role of court fool; the protagonist remembers that Nebuchadnezzar had been condemned to a similar punishment.

> He thoughte on Nabugodonosore,
> A noble kyng, was him bifore.
> In al the world nas his peer,
> Forte acounte, fer ne neer.
> With him was Sire Olyferne,
> Prince of knihtes stout and steorne.
> Olyferne swor evermor
> Bi god Nabugodonosor,
> And seide ther nas no god in londe
> But Nabugodonosor, ich understonde.
> Therfore Nabugodonosor was glad,
> That he the name of god had,
> And **lovede Olofern** the more;
> And seythe hit greved hem bothe sore.
> Olofern **dyyede** in dolour,
> He was slaye in hard schour.
> **Nabugodonosor lyvede in desert**;
> Dorst he noughwher ben apert;
> Fyftene yer he livede thare
> With rootes, gras, and evel fare. (lines 309-328) [154]

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152 Vittore Branca (ed.), *Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron (con le illustrazioni dell'autore e di grandi artisti fra tre e quattrocento*, Firenze: Le Lettere, 1999, pp. 146-152.
153 Beritola is never explicitly defined as mad, but her actions can hardly be judged sensible.
154 Edward E. Foster (ed.), *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, p. 104.

Here, Olyferne's death is not explicitly indicated as the reason for Nebuchadnezzar's madness; to the medieval audience, the king's pride for Olyferne's unwise compliments was a more probable cause of sin and consequently of madness. Nevertheless, the indication on the part of the author that Nebuchadnezzar loved Olyferne, and the description of his death immediately before Nebuchadnezzar's madness, include sorrow for the loss of someone to the king's punishment. This passage might thus represent a link between madness as divine punishment and madness deriving from excessive grief.

Whatever the reasons why they are separated from their lovers, Lancelot and the others share a deep sorrow for their situation. Madness generally follows a description of their grief, even though it is sometimes lost in the Middle English translations. In the *Folie Lancelot,* the protagonist is tormented by regret when he looks back to Camelot (FL 21); Ywain wishes he was never born (YG 44; line 1645), and Tristan experiences a phase of melancholy before going completely insane (MDA 368-369).

These, however, are not the only cases where the hero is separated from his lover. Most medieval romances and lays are centred on this *topos*, and yet, in these cases, the reaction of the protagonist seems to be particularly dramatic. Lancelot, for example, is accused of betrayal by Guinevere also on other occasions, as for instance in the episode of *The Fair Lady of Astolat* (MDA 776), but he does not lose his mind. One cannot help wondering what is so special in these separations that justifies such an extreme reaction.

A partial explanation might be found in the *Lai de Narcisse*, an Old French adaptation of the Ovidian myth. During the Middle Ages, Ovid was far from forgotten.[155] He was considered an infallible authority in love-lore, and his works constituted a model to welcome love in a positive light and at the same time mitigate the

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[155] Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, "Yvain's Madness" in *Philological Quarterly* (71), 1992, pp. 377-97, p. 379, p. 380.

natural instincts which, when out of control, could lead to disastrous outcomes.[156] The Old French version of the story of Narcissus, begins with a warning on the part of the narrator to observe the right balance and common sense in every aspect of life.

> Qui tout veut faire sans consel,
> Se maus l'en vient, ne m'en mervel;
> en toute riens est bien droture
> C'on i esgart sens et mesure.(lines 1-4)[157]

> Those who want to do everything without reason do not surprise me if they end up badly; it is well advisable to act with common sense and good measure in all things. (translation mine)

These lines represent the moral of the lay and consequently the key to understand the events narrated. In this version of the story, the ultimate tragedy is principally due to the ignorance of the two young protagonists in the matter of love. Seeing the handsome Narcissus from a window, princess Danae falls in love with him, but fails to ask for advice to someone wiser about how to control her passion. When she finally decides to face the young man and confess her feelings, Narcissus proclaims himself too young to understand love and rejects her roughly, thus causing the despair of the young lady, who invokes the gods to have him punished. He is thus condemned to experience the same burning passion for the first person he sees and therefore falls in love with himself after seeing his own reflection in a pool. Before drowning himself, he manages to see Danae one last time and repent for having pained her.

When Danae is refused by Narcissus, she attempts to seduce the young man by undressing in front of him. This action irritates the proud Narcissus even more, and Danae is abandoned to despair and regret. She laments the shameful way in which she has behaved and she wonders whether she has become a savage.

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[156] Tracy Adams, *Violent Passions: Managing Love in the Old French Verse Romance*, New York: Macmillan, 2005, p. 37.
[157] Martine Thiry-Stassin, Madeleine Tyssens (eds.), *Narcisse: Conte Ovidien Français du XIIe Siècle*, Paris: les Belles Lettres, 1976, p. 81.

> [...] tu es Dané,
> As je donques le **sens dervé**?
> Ja soloie-je estre plus sage,
> Suis je devenue **sauvage**? (lines 605-608)[158]

> You are Danae! Have I completely lost my mind? Once I used to be wiser, have I become a savage? (translation mine)

Although Danae does not experience the wild madness of the Arthurian knights, her situation somehow resembles theirs: after a rough and hopeless separation from the object of her love, she gives up her clothes, finds herself in a wild environment, and apparently feels a momentary alienation from civilisation, as she defines herself a "sauvage". The reasons for this troubled state of mind seem to be the excessive violence of Danae's passion and the fact that she is unable to contain it, together with the indelicate refusal on the part of Narcissus and the remorse for having behaved in an inappropriate way.

The Arthurian wild knights can be similarly accused of excessive passion. Lancelot and Tristan are the most evident cases; their love for Guinevere and Isolde leads them to an illicit relationship, which is condemned by the entire community. In these episodes, Lancelot is so overwhelmed by his desire to sleep with the queen that he does not realise that he is sharing the bed with another woman, and Tristan abandons himself to a sudden jealousy without listening to Iseult's explanation. Ywain's unconditioned love for Alundyne, even if accepted and legitimised by his conquest of the lady's castle and by subsequent marriage, places him in the unpleasant situation of promising complete submission both to his king and to the lady. Finally, Partonope's passion for this faery mistress is initially instigated more by the pleasures he enjoys than by the virtues of the lady; the protagonist is consequently convinced to accept a relationship based on very obscure, unequal and dangerous terms. Later, he is persuaded by the bishop to transgress the conditions imposed by the lady, when he should have

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[158] *Narcisse*, pp. 101-102.

been convinced of Melior's good intentions. His choices seem therefore guided more by the passions of the moment, desire in the first case, fear in the second, than by reason and conscience. All these characters are therefore in a similar situation, and they are doing exactly what the author of the *Lai de Narcisse* warns not to do. They do not act as they should because they are enslaved to their passions and forgetful of their reason and "sense et mesure", and consequently cease to profit from the most ennobling aspects of love. The positive force of love which, if tempered by intellect and continence, would encourage and guide them to reach perfection thus becomes a destructive element and degrades them to the status of animals. Besides, like Danae, they do not seek any help from those around them, in some cases they even refuse assistance, as does Tristan when he refuses the food of Palamedes' maid and flees from her (MDA 368-369). A clear warning against keeping sorrow for oneself can be found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cryseide*. In the first book, the young warrior is affected by love-sickness but does not want to reveal the real reason of his melancholy to anyone; his friend Pandarus tries to convince him to share his sorrow with him, arguing that "men seyn, 'to wrecche is consolacioun to have another felawe in hys peyne'" (RC 483; book I, line 708-709). Since Troilus still refuses to talk, Pandarus fears that he might die or lose his sanity.

> Yet Troilus for al this no word seyde,
> But lange he ley as stylle as he ded were:
> and after this with sikynge he abreyde,
> And to Pandarus vois he lente his ere,
> And up his eighen caste he, that in feere
> Was Pandarus, **lest that in frenesie**
> **He sholde falle, or elles soone dye** (RC 483; book I, lines 722-728)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term *frenesie* does not necessarily refer to the specific madness we are dealing with, but it is interesting that Pandarus should see madness as a possible outcome of keeping love's grief for oneself. Naturally, in the case of Troilus and Danae, the necessity to disclose their passions to someone

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wiser derives principally from their inexperience and consequent need to be schooled in the many rules of the game of love. This is not the problem with Lancelot and the others, but, in his speech, Pandarus argues that a trustworthy counsellor, even one who has never been a successful lover (RC 482; book I; lines 624-635), will be helpful in any circumstances. The fact that these knights surrender to despair without looking for external help might contribute to this particular outcome of their sorrow.

Danae's anguish does not derive uniquely from Narcissus' refusal; she also regrets having behaved in a way so inappropriate for her position. Part of her sorrow and confusion is therefore due to shame and fear of dishonour. The Arthurian knights are similarly concerned with honour. After being healed, for example, they express shame and regret for what they might have done during their madness. Even though it might not be a deliberate fault, these knights are generally separated from their ladies because of something they have done; the awareness of this and the consequent shame might explain why they react in such an excessive fashion.

In "The Distracted Knight", Judith Neaman already identified dishonour as the possible cause for Lancelot's and Ywain's madness.[159] Similarly Derek Pearsall observes that in Arthurian literature, excessive shame is generally expressed with madness.[160] Despite their valour, however, Lancelot and the others are not so unused to shame as one might believe. When Elaine arrives at King Arthur's court, Lancelot feels terribly embarrassed for how he had behaved on his last meeting with the lady, but he does not lose his mind for this.

> but whan sir lancelot sye her he was so **ashamed**, [and] that bycause he drew hys swerde to her on the morne aftir that he had layne by her, that he wolde nat salewe her nother speke wyth her. And yet sir Lancelot thought that she was the fayrest woman that ever he sye in

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[159] Judith Silverman Neaman, "The Distracted Knight: A Study of Insanity in the Arthurian Romances", doctoral diss. Columbia University, 1968, pp. 171; 182; 186.

[160] Derek Pearsall, "Courtesy and Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the Order of Shame and the Invention of Embarrassment", Derek Brewer, Jonathan Gibson (eds.), *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997, pp. 351-362, p. 361.

his lyeff dayes. (MDA 592)

The aim of this passage might be simply recalling a previous episode, but it is evident that both writer and audience had no difficulty in describing and imagining an embarrassed Lancelot; his madness must be the result of something more complex.

As anticipated in the previous section, these characters actually find themselves in a lose-lose situation and their apparently inappropriate actions are probably the result of choosing the lesser of two evils. Madness could be due not only to a sense of dishonour, but also to their being aware that they could not do otherwise. Madness thus represents the only way-out from this short circuit of emotions and values. This seems confirmed by a consideration Ywain makes when he hastens to go and save Lunette and fears he might not arrive in time.

> For, sertes, if sho war done to ded,
> of him war than **none other rede**
> bot oither he sold hymselven **sla**
> or **wode ogain to the wod ga** (lines 2375-2378; YG 64)

At this point of the story, Ywain is risking to find himself once again in a no-win situation: he has promised to fight as Lunette's champion but at the same time he has been asked to defend Gawain's sister and her family from the abuses of their neighbour. The protagonist feels compelled to commit to both causes, since refusing help would be dishonourable, but at the same time he realises he might not be able to attend both fights and that he would be the indirect cause of Lunette's death. In this case, the possible options would be suicide or madness. Since the first is condemned by Christian religion, and would put an end to the protagonist's adventures, insanity stands out as the only possible solution. Line 2378 clearly refers to his previous wild madness, it is therefore likely that also in that case insanity is to be considered as a way-out from a *cul de sac* situation and as an alternative to suicide. Interestingly, the opposition between madness

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and death returns later in the text. The protagonist claims that unless he is pardoned by his lady he "most go wode or for luf dy" (YG 102; lines 3833-34). Ywain's doubts and conclusion seem to be the same as in lines 2375-2378, but in this case, it seems more a question of grief than of dishonour, even though the lady's forgiveness implies that Ywain's fault has been somehow cancelled. This suggests that the knight's wild madness might be the result of a combination of grief and dishonour.

The association between madness, loss of the beloved and dishonour can be found in the story of sir Matto Le Breune as well. This character is briefly mentioned in *Le Morte Darthur*. After being attacked by Tristan in the forest, Dagonet relates this strange encounter to king Mark; the king erroneously concludes that the wild madman must be sir Matto and tells his story. The knight had been separated from his lady after being defeated by sir Gaheris and had consequently lost his mind and wandered in the wood ever since (MDA 371). A longer account of this story can be found in the *Roman de Tristan en Prose* (MRT 255-257), where it is clear that the knight had gone mad for sorrow and for the dishonour of having lost the duel against sir Gaheris. There are no explicit details about sir Matto's insanity, which unfortunately is mentioned only in these two texts, but the fact that king Mark mistakes Tristan for him suggests that he was probably known to be affected by the same wild madness. The story of Matto le Breune clearly represents a *mise en abyme* of Tristan's story, but, unlike Lancelot or Ywain, it is not clear why Tristan should feel ashamed. As in *Ywain and Gawain*, madness is here presented as an alternative to suicide: in the French text, Tristan passes from the melancholic phase to wild madness when he does not find his sword to kill himself (CRT 173).

Tristan's sorrow and jealousy[161] would be sufficient to justify his despair and

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[161] Jealousy was considered a possible cause of madness even in a legal context, as will be explained in the next section.

consequent madness, but this is not the only occasion on which Tristan has a rival for Isolde's love. In the *Folie Tristan*, Isolde is said to have once fallen in love with an Irish minstrel (FT, 21; lines 765-776), but Tristan does not lose his mind for this. It is surprising that in this episode, he should go mad for an imaginary betrayal. Besides, during his first meeting with Isolde after being healed, nothing is said to explain the misunderstanding of the letters; the two lovers simply behave as if nothing had happened making it even more difficult to understand why Tristan had reacted in such an extreme fashion. A possible help comes from the already mentioned *Tristano Panciatichiano*. In this version, Tristan is convinced by Palamede's maid that such a betrayal on the part of Isolde would be impossible. He then realises not only that the queen is certainly suffering for his absence, but also that his emphatic departure from Tintagel has revealed to the king his presence in the castle. He then fears that king Mark might punish his wife for having kept her lover hidden in his house.

> et Tristano si parte tutto arrabbiato et la notte albergò sotto ad uno albore con grande dolore e ricordava la reina Ysotta e lo male ch'ella aveva fatto con Ghedino. E poi diceva, "Elli non puote essere che madonna Ysotta abbia fatto fallo." Et Tristano à sì grande dolore della partita che fatta avea che forte temea che lla reina non fusse in malo stato. D'altra parte temea che lo re marco non facesse contra lei grande novità e piangeva molto teneramente. […] Et la damigella, messagiera di Palamide, sempre li andava apresso et avevane grande pietà. Et seppe per lo lamento di Tristano onde quello dolore venia e perché. Allora disse, "Messer Tristano, ora so io vostro curruccio e vostro dolore e onde viene e io metterò consiglio in vostro curruccio, s'a voi piacerà, per tale convenente, ché al mondo non à damigella a cui ne pesi più che fa a me. Voi avete gittate le vostre arme et è presso a tre dì che voi non mangiaste et cosie uscerete voi di senno et farete vergogna a tutta cavalleria. Et quando li cavalieri uderanno vostra fine che voi farete sì malvagia e sì vituperevile, si la si terranno a grande onta. D'altra parte, la reina ne fie a troppo male agio quando ella saprà vostra dolorosa morte. Et dicovi, messer, ch'elli aviene spesse fiate che ciò che l'uomo dice non é vero. Et io so di vero che madonna Ysotta v'ama di buono coraggio e si muore di suo amore che a voi porta, là onde di voi é grande danno et di lei. Et anchora potreste essere co llei a grande agio e a vostro e a suo diletto sicome già siete stati." Et Tristano à ricolte tutte queste parole e conosce come la damigella di tutte cose dice vero. Et Tristano disse, "Damigella, io vi prego quanto so, e se di me vi cale, che voi doviate andare a Tintoille alla reina Ysotta. et tanto fate che voi le parliate et salutatela da parte mia e pregatela da parte mia ch'ella sia leale dama a suo signore. et [ditele] che lo scambio ch'ella a' preso di me m'à recato alla morte, e che di me non prenda corrucccio." et quando elli ebbe dette queste parole e elli mise uno grande grido e uno mugghio doloroso. Et allora lo celabro li si rivolse et diventò pazzo, et incontenente se ne va per la foresta gridando e abaiando come diavole.[162]

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[162] *Il Tristano Panciatichiano*, pp. 296; 298.

And Tristan leaves, very angry, and spent the night under a tree, suffering greatly and remembering Queen Yseut and the wickedness that she had done with Kahedin. And then he said, "It cannot be that Lady Yseut has acted wrongly." And Tristan suffers greatly about the departure that he had made because he greatly feared that the queen was in a bad way. On the other hand, he feared that king Mark might commit some new thing against her, and he was weeping very tenderly. […] and the damsel, Palamedes' messenger, was going along near him him the whole time and had great compassion for him, and she found out from Tristan's lamenting whence the pain had come and why. Then she said, "Sir Tristan, now I understand your anger and your pain and whence it comes, and I will give you some counsel about your anger as is fitting, if it pleases you, because there is not a damsel in the world whom it troubles more than it does me. You have thrown down your arms, and it is nearly three days since you have eaten, and thus you will lose your mind and bring shame to all of chivalry. and when the knights hear about the wicked and dishonourable end that you will make, they will hold it to be a great shame. On the other hand, the queen will be too ill at ease when she finds out about your sad death. and I tell you, sir, that it happens many times that what people say isn't true. And I know truly that lady Yseut loves you wholeheartedly and she is dying for the love that she has for you, whence there is great harm both for you and for her. and you could still be with her in great ease and at your delight, and hers, as you have already been." and Tristan took in all these words and knew that the damsel was speaking truthfully about everything, and Tristan said, "Damsel, I pray you as much as I know how, and if you care for me, that you must go to Tintagel to Queen Yseut and try your best to speak to her and greet her for me and beg her for me to be a loyal lady to her lord. And say that the substitution that she made for me has brought me to my death and that she must not become vexed about me." And when he had said these words, he let out a great cry and a sorrowful bellow. And then his brain twisted and he became mad and immediately he goes away through the forest shrieking and barking like devils.[163]

Tristan is here tormented by grief, jealousy, shame and sense of guilt, just as the other mad knights. This passage might be an original addition of the Tuscan translator, but it gives a useful key to understand what might have been the audience's perception of Tristan's actions. After reading the Italian text, the facts that Tristan rides out of Tintagel "knyghtly" and "opynly" (MDA 368) and that Mark sees him outside the castle and realises he must have been hidden in his house (CRT 146-147) assume a totally different function. Not only do they comically present the king as a cuckold, but they also underline Isolde's dangerous position after Tristan's sudden escape.

Finally, if we consider these episodes according to the courtly love doctrine and to the concept of *militia amoris*, it is clear that all these knights suffer a dishonourable defeat in the war of love. They fail to maintain their fidelity and to fulfil their duties towards their lady, whom they should venerate and serve as a soldier does with his commander or his king. Disobeying the rules of the battle of love and provoking the

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[163] *Il Tristano Panciatichiano*, pp. 297; 299.

resentment or the sorrow of the lady is no less shameful than losing a battle or a tournament. Besides, this might explain, as anticipated in the first chapter, why they escape from the company of other men and seek refuge in wild and isolated places, as if they were trying to hide the dishonour of defeat.

A combination of excessive grief and shame seems thus more likely to be the cause of this wild madness than divine intervention; these two interpretations, however, might be not totally opposed. The marginalia of a fourteenth century manuscript of the *Smithfield Decretals* contain an interesting story of a sinful hermit (fig. 7-13).[164] The episode represented seems to coincide with one of the tales from the *Vies des Pères*,[165] a thirteenth-century French version of the hagiographic collection *Vitae Patrum*. A hermit is tempted by the devil and he interrupts his retirement. He gets drunk and sleeps with a miller's wife; the miller finds this out and attacks them with a hammer, but is killed by the hermit. The latter is then assailed by remorse and confesses to the pope in Rome. After the confession, the hermit returns to the forest in penitence and is forgiven two years later. In the marginalia, his penitence in the wood is represented as a wild madness: in the *bas-de-pages* of ff. 117v and f 118r, the hermit is covered with hair and is represented while moving on his hands and knees towards a cavern and standing among animals. In the French story, nothing is said explicitly about the hermit's going mad with sorrow and remorse; nevertheless, after he feels an unbearable grief and decides to go to Rome,[166] he gives up his clothes, refuses food and lives in the wood, sleeping on a bed of hay. Besides, the people he meets define him as "fool".[167] He therefore presents most of the symptoms of wild madness. The whole context makes it impossible to exclude the divine punishment but at the same time madness occurs only

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[164] London, British Library, Royal Ms 10 E IV, ff. 113v-118v (known as the Smithfield Decretals).
[165] Félix Lecoy (ed.), *La Vie des Pères*, vol. II, Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1993, pp. 169-182.
[166] *La Vie des Pères*, p. 179.
[167] *La Vie des Pères*, pp. 179-180.

after the protagonist has lamented his sorrow and remorse.[168] Similarly, in the case of the mad knights, the idea of divine punishment might be implied and the audience might have seen the knight's sorrow and consequent madness as part of God's plan. Insanity as a consequence of an excess of feeling, however, probably allowed more interesting developments in the plot: nothing can be done about a punishment coming from God, but someone who becomes mad because of sorrow or shame can be found and healed by his fellow men. This suggests that the authors of these episodes privileged narrative over the moral message.

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[168] *La Vie des Pères*, pp. 178-179.

5
Madness in Medieval Society

Modern literature about inwardness is generally regarded as implicitly deriving from the centrality of the single person; consequently, modern readers tend to conceive of madness as a tragedy of the individual. This, however, need not correspond to the feelings of the medieval audience, at least not always. In the medieval frame of mind, any creature was part of the great chain of being and had its role in the universe; when a link in the chain ceased to fulfil its function, this would influence the whole community; a sudden madness certainly was something which affected one's role in society. Hence, its effects were bound to be perceived as a collective damage, whose seriousness was proportional to the importance of the role of the madman before his illness. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the healing of the madman was a concern of the community; consequently, it is natural to think that the cause of madness was not to be associated only with the single person but with society as a whole or at least with some of its members. In this chapter, the social implications of the knight's wild madness will be analysed. Moreover, the laws and customs which regulated the status of lunatics and their care on the part of the community will be investigated, together with the possible influences on the adventures of the wild knight.

5.1.1 Madness and the Community

Madmen were not necessarily considered taboo elements of the community, but their position was certainly ambiguous. As already mentioned in the section about the wild setting, the lunatic is often associated with what is outside the community. It is not difficult to imagine why: the madman does not recognise and respect the set of social

rules which is essential for the balance of the community, and does not generally contribute to its welfare. On the contrary, the madman can represent a threat for his fellows.

In terms of morality, the madman constitutes a paradox for the medieval frame of mind. As will be later analysed, the madman was not responsible for his actions, and therefore could not be condemned for any sin or misdeed. This, however, means that sin can be committed without deserving punishment. Like the fool of Psalm 52, the madman seems justified by his insanity even when he affirms that "God does not exist". This naturally places the madman in an extremely problematic position in the eyes of the other members of the community. Moira Fitzgibbons notices how the author of the fourteenth-century *The Prick of Conscience* does not seem at ease when mentioning madness, probably because of this paradox. He states clearly that children too young to understand sin experience purgatory after death, and he often uses the term "wode" to describe the torments of hell, but he never talks explicitly about the afterlife of madmen.[169] At the same time, some people who had experienced madness, like Margery Kempe or Ida van Leuven, could be regarded as examples of sanctity and virtue. Sometimes, as happened to these two women, madness was the first step in the mystic's experience.[170]

Madness represented not only a loophole in medieval morality and theology, but also a practical detriment in the life of the community. As can be easily inferred, a lunatic with a violent nature could be the source of damages and aggressions, but these are not the only negative consequences of having a madman in the community. Insanity, especially when it appeared suddenly and unexpectedly, inevitably created a gap in the

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[169] Moira Fitzgibbons, "Enabled and Disabled 'Myndes' in *The Prick of Conscience*", Seeta Changati (ed.), *Medieval Poetics and Social Practice*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, pp. 72-94, p. 85.

[170] For further information about Ida van Leuven and madness and mysticism see Nancy Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42, 2000, pp. 268-306.

social structure. The madman could not be expected to fulfil any social function, and somebody else had to step in. Apart from the obvious disadvantages of having to replace the madman in his role, this often created unpleasant situations for the lunatic's family. In her article "Angry Wives of Madmen: The Economic Constraints of Families under Royal Guardianship",[171] Wendy Turner explores how the guardians assigned to the madman had full power over the lunatic's possessions, and the madman's wife and heirs were often reduced to poverty. It was not unusual for a woman who used to be in charge of the household to be deprived of her role as soon as her husband's insanity was made known to the royal authorities. Madness therefore is not only the tragedy of the individual, but also of his family and friends.

It is difficult to establish when the Biblical view of the madman as a sinner who had to be separated from the other members of the community was replaced by a more protective attitude towards lunatics. The two visions might have co-existed for a long time. However, the link between the totality of the community and each of its members, together with the delicate balance regulating social welfare probably became more topical from the tenth century on, when, as a consequence of the increase of the population, Europe became more urbanised.[172] Apart from the obvious necessity of regulating the relationship between its members, inhabited centres had new needs as well. The community was no longer a small independent isle of civilisation surrounded by wilderness, but a network within a bigger network of cities. Excluding madmen from the community was probably a less effective solution than keeping them under control. The foundation in 1247 of the Bedlem Royal Hospital, better known with the name of

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[171] Wendy J. Turner, "Angry Wives of Madmen: The Economic Constraints of Families under Royal Guardianship in England", Wendy J. Turner, Tory Vandeventer Pearman (eds.), *Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe, Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010, pp. 51-68.

[172] See Adriaan Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Bedlam,[173] seems to confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, the fact that most of the "scientific" treatises about madness analysed in Chapter 3 were written in the thirteenth century, reinforces the idea that the increased urbanisation brought along a new vision of madness and new ways to handle it.

After flourishing during the first half of the century, the European population was then decimated by the Black Death (1348-1350). The plague left great social voids in communities, and in the Anglo-Norman area, the survivors were further reduced because of the war between France and England (1337-1453). It is possible that the idea that each member of the community must be protected was strongly reinforced in this period; after the Black Death, medieval towns suffered a dramatic shortage in labour force which affected many aspects of the economy of the time, from agriculture to manufacturing.[174] The demographic reduction after the plague was so extreme that workers' wages rose exponentially; in 1350 a ploughman could ask for a wage of ten shillings and six pence per week, while in 1347 the average wage was only two shillings.[175] In London, new laws and institutions were created in order to keep under control the disorders and social instability created by the lack of working force and fear of a new disease during the plague-aftermath.[176] The wish to return to a balanced and ordered society can be felt also in some literary works, such as Lydgate's *A Dietary, and a Doctrine for Pestilence*. Here, the poet insists on the necessity of being charitable, patient and generous with all, rich and poor, in order to survive to the plague (lines 106-108; 124-126; 134).[177] Although there does not seem to be texts where the wardship and

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[173] Theo B. Hyslop, *Great Abnormals: Historic Cases of Insanity*, Kila: Kessinger Publishing, 2003, p. 148.

[174] Bruce M. S. Campbell, "Grain Yields on English Demesnes after the Black Death", Mark Bailey, Stephen Rigby (eds.), *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, pp. 121-174, pp. 121;124; David Stone, "The Black Death and Its Immediate Aftermath", *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death*, pp. 213-244; p. 215.

[175] Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death, Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe*, New York: The Free Press, 1983. p. 94.

[176] Franc Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 68-125.

[177] Henry Noble MacCracken, Merriam Sherwood (eds.), *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, London:

care of lunatics and the demographic depression are explicitly correlated, it is not unlikely that during the plague aftermath the idea that each individual is to be defended for the sake of the community might have further favoured the affirmation of the protective approach towards madmen on the Biblical "exclusive" one.

From the fourteenth century on, another factor made the Biblical vision of the madman as a sinner who has to be sent away from his fellow-men problematic. Like the plague, madness creates a social gap, as mentioned above, and this hole in the structure of the community is more dramatic if the madman is supposed to fulfil an important role. This idea certainly became all the more evident in the medieval frame of mind when France and then Britain had to deal with insane kings. Charles VI of France (1380 – 1422) suffered from a form of violent madness.[178] His successor Charles VII (1403 – 1461) lost his mind in the last months of his reign.[179] Finally, Henry VI of England (1421 – 1471) suffered long periods of insanity throughout his life.[180] For nearly one hundred years, the Anglo-French area witnessed the most extreme manifestation of the paradox of "the king's two bodies".[181] The "spiritual body" of the king needed to transcend earthly nature and to become the incarnation of the political, moral and theological values he represented; and yet, the king had also a physical body, which could present defects and was subject to illness and death. Royal madness certainly was a disturbing topic at the time; besides, the ambiguous moral status of insanity must have made the idea of a mad king all the more unacceptable. The illness of the sovereign therefore had to be hidden or somehow ennobled. In the case of Henry VI, for example,

Oxford University Press, 1934, vol. II, pp. 705- 707.

[178] Peter S. Lewis, *La France à la Fin du Moyen Âge, La Société Politique*, Paris: Hachette, 1977, pp. 169-170.

[179] Lewis, pp. 171-172; Michel Hérubel, *Charles VII*, Paris: Olivier Orban, 1981, pp. 332-333.

[180] Wendy J. Turner, "A Cure for the King Means the Health for the Country: The Mental and Physical Health of Henry VI", *Madness in Medieval Law and Custom*, pp. 177-195.

[181] For further information about this concept see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies, A Study in Medieval Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

some historians of the time tended to underline the king's childlike innocence.[182] The sovereign's illness was thus transformed in a moral quality, but is also extremely likely that the concept of madness as a punishment for one's sins probably needed to be reconsidered, at least among the upper classes.

The royal insanity probably also accentuated the idea that the negative consequences of madness affect the lunatic's family and friends, more than the madman himself. The conflict between the spiritual and physical bodies of the king might have been a problem more for the intellectuals of the time than for the lower classes, but an incapable sovereign actually also brought along very tangible consequences for the entire kingdom. From 1337 – 1453, England and France went through the Hundred Years War. An insane king meant that the country did not have a strong political leader to guide it throughout the conflict. Even in a time of relative peace, an ineffective sovereign might lead to war. When Henry VI had his first mental breakdown in 1453, England fell into a political crisis and the Duke of York was appointed protector, until the king recovered. This absence of a strong and legitimate ruler and of a continuity in the power is believed to have been one of the principal causes of the War of the Roses,[183] which divided English aristocracy from 1455 to 1485. All these social feelings were certainly reflected in literature, and some of them can be found also in the episodes of wild madness analysed in this thesis, as will be explored in the next section.

5.1.2 The Wild Knight and the Community

In these episodes of madness, the importance of the community of people connected with the madman is evident first of all in terms of narrative focus. As already observed

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[182] Cory James Rushton, "Dealing with Royal Paralysis in Late Medieval England", *Madness in Medieval Law and Custom*, pp. 147-176, pp. 167-168.

[183] John A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011, pp. 112-113; Katherine J. Lewis, *Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*, New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 54.

in the previous chapter, as soon as madness strikes them, these knights apparently cease to have a psychological existence; the point of view therefore shifts from them to those they meet. There are only some occasional returns to what the mad knight is thinking or feeling, but the author always refers to basic instincts, such as the will to protect a source of sustenance, as can be seen in the case of Tristan or Lancelot. Tristan runs to the aid of the shepherds threatened by Dagonet because they are those "that were wonte to gyff him mete" (MDA 371) and when Sir Blyaunte is attacked by two knights, Lancelot is said to be sorry for his master.

> And as they cam hurlyng undir the castell, there was sir Lancelot at a wyndow, and saw how two knyghtes layde upon sir Blyaunte wyth there swerdys. And whan sir Lancelot saw that, yet as wode as he was he was sory for hys lorde, sir Blyaunte. (MDA 606)

We are given to understand that Lancelot considers himself dependant on sir Blyaunte, since he refers to him as "hys lorde"; the protagonist's subsequent intervention to save sir Blyaunte is probably either the result of gratitude for having fed and dressed him or an act of fidelity, as can be expected on the part of a dog towards its master. And yet, even though the modern reader might find this sort of feelings simple and primitive, the writer's observation that Lancelot felt sorry "yet as wode as he was" suggests that a madman was not expected to feel these emotions and that he is perceived as having no inwardness worth speaking of.

The focus on the community not only gives an idea of how these madmen appear to people in full possession of their faculties, but it also determines whether the situation should be perceived as comic or tragic, which would be otherwise difficult to establish. Lancelot's sleeping in King Pelles' garden, for example, is no more tragic than Tristan's beating sir Dagonet, but Elayne's tears in recognising the knight make the first scene tragic, while Dagonet's witty remark about his being a clown hit by a fool suggests that the second scene might have been felt as comic.

And whan that she [Elayne] behylde hym, anone she felle in remembraunce of hym and knew hym veryly for sir Launcelot. And therewythall she felle on wepynge so hartely that she senke evyn to the erthe. (MDA 609)

Than sir Dagonet rode to kynge Marke and tolde hym how he had spedde in the foreyste, "and therefore", seyde sir Dagonet, "beware, kynge Marke, that thou come nat about that well in the foreyste, for there ys a foole naked. And that foole and I, foole, mette togydir, and he had allmoste slayne me". (MDA 371)

The protagonist's family and friends are not simply grieved for the knight's condition, but seem to perceive the protagonist's state as harmful for the whole community. In *Partonope of Blois*, there is a long description of the sorrow and disorder that the hero's strange attitude has caused to the community; the people taken into consideration are Partonope's mother, the bishops who try to console him, the king of France, and finally the hero's men, who, after waiting at his door for six days, return to their houses without knowing what to do and surrender to despair for having lost their lord.

His moder and meany stode with-oute,
Of his disease euer complaynyng,
Till on Þe morowe the sonne gan spryng,
That of hym they had no comforte,
Ne noone of them couÞer sporte.
Anoone Þrugh Fraunce it ronne Þe tithynge
That Partonope lieÞ in poynt of deyig
For hevynesse of sory mysschaunce.
And anoone Þerwith Þe kyng of Fraunce
After Erchbisshopps and bisshopps sent in haste,
And bade that they shuld hye hem faste
To Bleys to comforte her good ffrende.

Grete sorowe made all his meany
And euery day full oft they be
Atte dore of her lordes prisone
Lystenyng alwey if any sowne
Or worde of hym they myght here.
But all for nought; of hym no chere
They couÞe haue, Þis is no nay.
This lyfe they ladde vj. Wekes day,
And they Þen toke hem euerychone
What counseylle was beste to doone,
And seyne: "In grete wanhope
Oure lorde is loste, Partonope".
Therefore eiche man trusse hem hoome.
"This is Þe beste Þat we may doone"
Thus they go withoute leve takyng,
Eiche man to his house sore wepyng. (PB 254-256; lines 6594-6605; 6627-6642)

The sorrow for Partonope's sad state is extended to people with different social statuses and different roles in the life of the protagonist: from his family to the religious authority, from his sovereign to his servants, the whole community has been affected by what has happened to the knight. In addition, among the first people whose grief is described, we find Partonope's mother and the bishops, that is to say those who were principally responsible for convincing him to commit his fault (PB 214-220; lines 5649-5808). Not only does this sorrow involve all members of society around him, but the responsibility is shared between the protagonist and other people.

Similarly, in the episodes of Lancelot and of Tristan, those who witness the knight's madness mourn more for the negative effects it will have on their world than for the protagonist. They are apparently more worried about the great loss for chivalry than about the actual safety of the mad knight. Palamedes, who at this point still considers himself Tristan's principal rival, accuses King Mark of having "destroyed that moste noble knyght, sir Tristramys de Lyones" (MDA 370); in the same way, when Elayne and Boors realise that Lancelot has gone out of his mind, Guinevere is accused of being responsible for Lancelot's misfortunes.

> Than she [Elayne] seyde unto quene Gwenyver, "Madame, ye ar gretly to blame for sir Lancelot, for now have ye loste hym, for I saw and harde by his countenance that he ys madde for ever. And therefore, alas! Madame, ye have done grete synne and yourselffe grete dyshonoure, for ye have a lorde royall of youre owne, and therefore hit were youre parte for to love hym; for there ys no quene in this worlde that hath suche another kynge as ye have. And yf ye were nat, I myght have getyn the love of my lorde sir Launcelot; and a grete cause I have to love hym, for he hadde my maydynhode and by hym I have borne a fayre sonne whose [name] ys sir Galahad. [...] I dare undirtake that he [Launcelot] ys marred for ever, and that have you made" (MDA 594-95)

> "Alas!" seyde sir Bors, "that ever sir Launcelot or ony of hys blood ever saw you, for now have ye loste the beste knight of oure blood, and he that was all oure leder and oure succoure. And I dare sey and make it good that all kynges crystynde nother hethynde may nat fynde suche a knyght, for to speke of his noblenes and curtesy, wyth hys beauté and hys jantylnes." (MDA 596)

Surprisingly, Guinevere's main fault, according to Elaine is not repudiating Lancelot,

but taking the knight as a lover while she already had the best king in the world for a husband, thus implying that her relationship with Lancelot threatens Arthur's image as a king as well. Elaine also accuses the queen of having impeded the natural outcome of the meeting between Lancelot and herself. Had it not been for Guinevere, Lancelot's story would have followed a very conventional narrative pattern, since the most skilled knight of the world would probably have been united with Elaine, described as the most beautiful woman on earth (MDA 592), and the mother of his son Galahad, the only knight destined to succeed in the quest for the Holy Grail. Lancelot's madness seems here to embody the sense of chaos created by the queen's extra-conjugal relationship at king Arthur's court. Even Bors blames Guinevere. He considers Lancelot's madness a loss for his family and for Camelot in terms of honour, but he also observes very pragmatically that Lancelot was their "leder" and "succoure"; consequently, king Arthur's forces are likely to suffer greatly for his absence. Social chaos and madness of the individual seem here strictly connected. The disorder of the community does not seem to be the direct consequence of the protagonist's madness, even though it certainly contributes to his going out of his mind, but Bors' and Elaine's complaints suggest that the knight's madness might be regarded as a symptom of the bad state of the community. The knight's loss of sanity mirrors the loss of stability and of values experienced at court.

In *Ywain and Gawain*, the protagonist's insanity is regarded as detrimental to the community's safety. When he loses his mind and flees to the wood, we find no words of compassion towards his sad state on the part of his friends, but we are told that his men look for him everywhere (YG 45; lines 1655-1656). Once again, what it is perceived is the void the protagonist has left in society, more that the actual tragedy of his being mad. This is confirmed also in other passages of the romance. When Ywain is found

sleeping under a tree, the maid suggests to her lady that were he not mad, he could be extremely useful in defending her (YG 47; lines 1741-1746). Moreover, in the final scene, Lunette insinuates that Alundyne is endangering her people by being without a husband to protect her lands.

> "Now er we hard byset;
> Madame, I ne wate what us es best,
> For here now may we have no rest.
> Ful wele I wate ye have no knight,
> That dar wende to yowre wel and fight
> With him that cumes yow to asaile;
> And, if he have here no batayle
> Ne findes none yow to defend,
> Yowre lose bese lorn withouten end." (lines 3856-3864; YG 102)

Finally, since the poet inserts a description of the happiness on the part of the members of Alundyne's court at her decision to take the valorous knight for a husband, and at the consequent perspective of safety (YG 33-34; lines 1198-1250), we can imagine a corresponding sorrow in the reign for the loss of such a defender. Even though we do not have the description of the grief of the community as in *Partonope of Blois*, the disastrous effects of the protagonist's absence are made clear by what he finds when he goes back to his land: the lady is constantly manipulated by the mischievous steward to the point that the good and wise Lunette has been accused of treason and will be condemned to death unless a champion defends her cause (Y 58; lines 2159-2175).

In romance, the idea that the actions of the individual must be aimed to the welfare of the community is always implied, together with the belief that the harm suffered by the single man affects the whole social structure, especially if the person plays an important role. The most evident example is the case of the Maimed King whose destiny is strictly linked to that of his lands, to the point that when he is wounded by Balin, the land suffers terrible famines, as prophesied by Merlin.

> "For thou shalt hurte the trewyst knyght and the man of moste worship that now lyvith; and

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thorow that stroke, three kyngdomys shall be brought into grete poverté, miseri and wrecchednesse twelve yerys. And the knyght shall nat be hole of that wounde many yerys" (MDA 54)

Lancelot and the others are not kings, but they certainly represent cases of excellence in the hierarchical world of chivalry. Their madness and consequent absence prevents them from fulfilling their social function, which, as suggested by Lunette's and Bors' concerns, is basically a role of defenders. This duty of the knight is explicitly confirmed in the romance of *Ysaÿe le Triste*; during his *accolade,* the hero agrees to defend widows, poor damsels, orphans as well as the Holy Church.

> "Chevaliers, soies crueux a tes anemis, debonaires a tes amis, humbles a non poans et aides toudis le droit a soutenir, et confong cely qui tort a vesves dames, povres pucelles et orphenins; et povre gent aime tous jours a ton pooir. Et avoec che, aime et aide toudis Sainte Eglise, s'aras tel esquier avoec toy que bien t'aidera ton fais a porter, se mestier est: or soies certains, fait ly ermittes, que che serra Jhesus Christ, ly fieux Dieu" (YT 41)

> "Knight, be cruel towards you enemies, good-hearted towards your friends, humble towards the weak, and help and support what is right every day, fight those who commit injustice against widows, poor maidens and orphans; love poor people everyday, as you can. Moreover, you must always love and serve the Holy Church, you will have with you a squire who will help you to carry your load, when you will need it, and be sure – said the hermit – that this will be Jesus Christ, the son of God". (translation mine)

In his madness, the knight, who normally should support and protect the weakest members of society, becomes someone who must be, if not defended, looked after: a disturbing inversion of roles and a fearful alteration of social structure. Moreover, as already mentioned, these wild knights present an extremely aggressive nature and constitute a danger for those who approach them.

In the case of Lancelot and Tristan the importance of the impact on the other members of the Arthurian court can be seen also in the narrative structure. The development of the adventures of the other knights who set off to search them and of the reactions of those who remained at court is nearly as long as the account of the hero's adventures as a madman. This is more evident in the French originals, where the digressions are more extended, but in the Middle English versions, the alternation of the

adventures of the madman and those of his friends is maintained. In the story of Tristan, although the questers and the other characters are given less space, a considerable number of people is mentioned. In addition, the change of focus in the digression is made less abrupt by the fact that, apart from the passage on sir Andred, it shifts to a character present in the previous scene, something which makes the sequence appear longer and somehow recreates the temporal interval of about "an halff-yere" (MDA 370) in which all these events take place.

In Lancelot's episode, Malory approaches the digression about the other knights differently. In the first place, he maintains a brief reference to Lancelot between the description of the company of questers and the beginning of the adventures of Percival and Aglovale:

> Now turne we unto sir Lancelot and speke we of hys care and woo, and what payne he
> there endured; for colde, hungir and thyrste he hadde plenté. (MDA 597)

The narration then goes back to the questers and Lancelot does not appear until the end of the adventures of Percival. This short passage apparently adds no information to the story and could have been easily deleted, as a more detailed description of Lancelot's life in the wood can be found immediately after Percival and Ector are healed. Malory's choice of maintaining it must have been dictated by other necessities. One of the aims of this short digression might be amplifying the temporal distance between the beginning of the expedition and the moment when the knights separate, in order to make the whole quest appear longer. Another effect of this focusing briefly on Lancelot is that of underlining the separation between Percival's adventure and that of the other knights. In the French text, the narration is much longer and more complex and also other characters, like sir Heret, Gawain and Ector, are taken into account (FL 25-35; 47-60; 72-153); in Malory, Percival seems to be the undisputed protagonist of the narration of

the questers. He is present in nearly all the scenes; even when the narration is apparently focused on Aglovale's fight to avenge his squire, Percival is described while defeating all the other men from the castle. Moreover, even if he is not physically present at Camelot, the conversation of the other characters revolves around him.

A focus on Percival might be aimed at presenting him as one of the best knights after Lancelot, especially considering that he is one of the protagonists of the quest for the Holy Grail, which in *Le Morte Darthur* is situated at the beginning of the following book. Malory might have curtailed the sections about the questers in order to create a continuity between this episode and the content of the following chapter, where Percival is one of the protagonists. A similar intent might be seen in the presence of the passage about Bors, another of the protagonists of the Grail quest, and his son Elyan. Despite the alterations present in the Middle English versions, it seems clear that both Malory and the French authors never thought of Lancelot or Tristan as the only protagonists of these episodes of madness, and their absence not only implies a potential harm for society, but also has very concrete consequences on those around them. Palamedes and Kahedin become friends while looking for Tristan and find that they can mourn together their love for Isolde (MDA 370); Isolde nearly kills herself (MDA 372), Percival starts his ascent as a knight (MDA 597-604) and Bors meets his son (MDA 615).

As far as the final moral message is concerned, the other characters seem to be involved even more than the mad protagonist. Once they are healed, these mad knights do not seem to have suffered such a radical change in their personality, although they prove wise enough not to repeat the same mistakes in their love relationships; repentance and awareness of the necessity of a better conduct seem to be associated more with those around them, above all with the ladies who are connected with their madness, than with the protagonists. Elaine is reminded by Lancelot of her role in

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causing his madness and resolves to retire with him (MDA 6010- 611) and Guinevere, when Lancelot returns to court and Ector and Percival tell his tale, is said to weep "as she shulde have dyed" (MDA 617). Moreover, in the episode of *The Poisoned Apple*, Bors observes that the queen was the first to repent when she treated Lancelot discourteously.

> Seyde sir Bors "for many tymys or this she hath bene wroth with you, and aftir that she was the first [that] repented it" (MDA 746)

Bors' comment need not refer only to the episode of Lancelot's madness, but he seems to assume that whenever Lancelot has been rebuked by the queen, she was the one who needed to repent. A similar approach can be seen also in the case of Melior who is convinced that forgiveness in love is more rewarding than rigidity, which in some cases is reprehensible just like an act of betrayal, as is explained in Urake's speech to her.

> Suster, he loved you twoo yere and more.
> He sawe ye neuer. Trow ye not sore
> It greved hym, yis so mote I the,
> All day with-oute company to be,
> And neuer to speke with you but in Þe nyght,
> And yite of you Þen to haue no sight?
> Though after be his counseylle he
> Shope hym fully you to se.
> What clepe ye bis? Shuld Þis be treasone?
> Me thinketh in Þis haue ye no reasone.
> But discrecion now telleth me
> He loved you better Þan euer ye
> Did hym, Þis is with-oute doute.
> [...]
> Which of you now haÞe be-trayed oÞer?
> Ye hym. (PB 317-318; lines 7896-7908;7912-7913)

Moreover, here madness is explicitly conceived as a punishment for someone who is not the madman. After Urake has found Partonope in the forest and nursed him back to health, she decides to punish her sister Melior for her lack of compassion towards her lover. She therefore tells her that Partonope has gone out of his mind because of her forsaking.

> For truly your owne love Partonope
> Ye made lese his witte for aye.
> This is verrey soÞe, Þis is no naye.
> So moche sorowe for you he hath take,
> Horne-wode he renneth for your sake.
> […] As wylde beste he renneth a-boute,
> of mete ne drinke taketh he none hede,
> Ne of slepe with-outen drede. (PB 314-317; lines 7841-7845; 7909-7911)

Urake's description of Partonope's supposed madness has a very dramatic effect on Melior; she does not seem to conceive of the protagonist's madness as a direct consequence of his disobedience, but as the result of his love for her.

> When Þe lady herde Þat Partonope
> for love of hir wode Ranne he,
> A-boute hir hert she felt such peyn,
> Moche wo she had hir to Restreyne
> Fro swonyng, for loÞe was she
> That hir hevynesse aspied shuld be
> Of Wrak, hir Suster, Þat was hir dere. (PB 315; lines 7854-7860)

Since the madness described by Urake mirrors that experienced by Lancelot and Ywain, it is natural to assume that the idea of insanity as a punishment for someone close to the madman might be present also in the case of Guinevere or Alundyne. At least in the case of Guinevere, a similar, if not even more dramatic, reaction on the part of the lady is described; the queen is said to faint and weep incessantly (MDA 596; 617). As far as Isolde is concerned, the audience is told that she wrote to Kahedin, thus causing Tristan's misunderstanding, only out of pity (MDA 367). She is however equally accused of being the cause of Tristan's madness.

> "Alas!" seyde sir Palomydes, "hit ys grete pité that ever so noble a knyght sholde be so myscheved for the love of a lady." (MDA 370)

The actual reasons why these knights experience madness have been investigated in the previous chapter; however, the idea of belonging to a community and of being one link in a complex chain might be helpful also to understand how they can

be, at least in part, condemned. According to Jean Markale, the fall of Camelot and the death of king Arthur are due also to Lancelot's individualism.[184] The knight acts more as an individual than as a member of the community to the point that his relationship with the queen breaks the basic rules of courtly love and becomes public, thus causing a civil war in the reign. This interpretation might be applied also to these cases of madness. All these heroes act more to satisfy their personal interests than to serve the community or to reach that perfection which sets them as inspirational models for those around them. Lancelot sleeps with Elaine out of mere lust, Tristan is too blinded by his own jealousy to think of the consequences of his actions, Ywain is too concerned with personal glory to remember what he had promised his wife, and consequently to the people of his lands as well, and finally Partonope is overwhelmed by the fear instigated by the bishop to respect his oath to his lady. After placing their individuality before the welfare of the society, they become primitive beings incapable of interacting with civilised men. This might also explain their urgency to leave that society to which they no longer conform. Their sudden alienation from civilisation might depend also on the awareness of not having fulfilled their duties and the expectations of the community in which both knights and ladies belong. In these episodes, two different approaches towards madness might co-exist: the protagonist implicitly believes that if a member of the community ceases to fulfil his function, he automatically becomes something other from the social environment, that is to say something wild, and therefore needs to be separated from it. On the other hand, those who see these wild knights evidently believe that they need more to be protected than excluded. The madman's escape might be seen as an unconscious way of protecting the community, while the other characters incarnate the innate tendency of the community to protect each of its members. The combination of these two attitudes here contributes to create an adventurous plot, since the questers

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[184] Jean Markale, *Lancelot et la Chevalerie Arthurienne*, Paris: Imago, 1985, pp. 10; 104; 184-185.

chase the madman to bring him back to the environment he has forsaken in a historical perspective. This protective approach towards the madman did not derive only from pity or from the common moral, but it was also regulated by the laws and conventions of the time.

5.2 Madness and Medieval Laws

Despite the Biblical representation of the madman as a repulsive sinner,[185] it seems that those affected by insanity were looked after not only in these romances but also in real life. As mentioned above, the foundation of Bedlam suggests that by that date, the idea of providing specific assistance for those who presented some mental illnesses within the community was widely accepted. In addition, as noted in the previous section, madness did not affect only the individual, but the whole community as well, also in terms of assistance.[186]

Unfortunately the extant documents about the legal status of the medieval madman gives only a partial vision of the reality of the time. We learn what laws and conventions were invoked in these cases mostly from accounts of trials for insanity. These usually concerned either people from the upper classes, whose properties had to be administrated by somebody else in case of madness, or people who were to be executed for murder and whose families pleaded for mercy affirming that the accused person was not responsible for his or her actions. In northern France, this was generally done by means of a remission letter, which the family wrote with the help of a royal notary and which was then read aloud in the presence of a local judge and of the adverse party. If the family's request was accepted, the accused person was not only graced, but

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[185] See Chapter 2.
[186] David Roffe, Christine Roffe, "Madness And Care In The Community: A Medieval Perspective", *British Medical Journal*, 311, 1995, pp. 1708-1712, p. 1708.

his or her reputation in the community was restored.[187] Since the Arthurian knights here analysed definitely belong to the aristocratic class and since the stories of their adventures were probably composed above all for an upper-class audience, both authors and readers might have been aware of some of the laws and conventions, especially those concerning the administration of the properties of the madman. Moreover, even if the king did not follow all trials personally, it seems that in some particular cases he was actually present, presumably with his court. This happened for instance during the trial for the murder of Hugh of Lincoln.[188] In 1255, the young boy was found dead in a well, and local people believed he had been kidnapped, tortured and killed by some members of the Jewish community, who were arrested and executed after a trial. The king followed the case very closely, and was even present during some stages of the trial. This episode has very little resemblance with what happens in these cases of madness, and was probably perceived as more sensational than the many trials to assign the wardship of a lunatic. However, it is not difficult to imagine that rumours of the most picturesque trials and of cases of madness might have reached the court in a similar way, even when they involved people from the lower classes.

In northern France the legal system was based on customary laws, which began to be transcribed in the thirteenth century; before this date, the transmission of the laws relied on local memory. The *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, the sixth-century set of laws developed under the Roman Emperor Justinian, was more widespread in southern France.[189] In England, after 1066, the Anglo-Saxon law blended with the Norman customs, and the Romanised canon law was adopted by the Church in 1072.[190] Since the

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[187] Aleksandra Pfau, "Crimes of Passion: Emotion and Madness in French Remission Letters", *Madness in Medieval Law and Custom*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 97-122, p. 101.

[188] David Carpenter, "King Henry III and the Jews", Susanne Jenks, Jonathan Rose,Christopher Whittick (eds), *Laws, Lawyers and Texts: Studies in Medieval Legal History in Honour of Paul Brand*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 129 – 148.

[189] Pfau, p. 109.

[190] Janin Hunt, *Medieval Justice: Cases and Laws in France, England and Germany, 500-1500*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2004, p. 64.

Middle English romances here analysed are translations of French texts, the possible legal echoes in these episodes probably derive mostly from the French jurisdictional system. Even though the French laws and customs were slightly different from the English, the two countries seem to have followed similar legal conventions and criteria as far as madmen were concerned. It is therefore very likely that any legal reference to the French customs could be understood also by the English audience.

In legal contexts, the natural fool was distinguished from the lunatic; the former was affected by idiocy or insanity from birth, while the lunatic was believed to experience only a temporary madness. In England, this difference was first officially established in the *Prerogativa Regis*, which was sanctioned under the reign of Edward I, and implied different modalities of wardship. Permanent fools were in the wardship of the king; the sovereign provided for them but received the profits of their estates until their death, when all properties and their profits passed on to their heirs. The temporary madman was a more complex matter. The king made provisions for him and his family but did not retain any profit from his estates. This was not established explicitly by any legal act, but it has been observed that it probably derived from customary practices. However, it seems that this task was originally assigned to the madman's family and this was still possible in the fourteenth century.[191] It is clear that for Lancelot and the others the category of the natural fool must be excluded, as their madness is absolutely temporary. In addition, this difference was probably clear also to the readers of these works, since, when Tristan begins to attend the company of the shepherds, they are said to shave his hair and to make him look like a fool, thus suggesting that the shepherds are mistaking the hero's temporary madness for a permanent one, and are consequently treating him like a natural fool.

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[191] Roffe, p.1709.

> And so he felle in the felyshyppe of herdsmen and shyperdis, and dayly they wolde gyff hym som of their mete and drynke, and whan he ded ony shrewde dede they wolde beate hym with roddys. And so they clypped hym with sherys and made hym lyke a foole. (MDA 369)

In the French text, the shepherds shave Tristan's head and paint his face, and these two actions are added to the other details about the protagonist's altered aspect. In the *Roman de Tristan*, the writer's concern is to underline that Tristan cannot be recognised, more than the fact that his insanity is misunderstood. On the contrary, the madman is said to endure everything without reacting or complaining, as "one who did not understand what they were doing" (MRT 248); the shepherds' attitude towards the madman seems therefore more acceptable in the French version than in Malory.

One additional distinction must be made between the harmless madman and the dangerous one. Peaceful madmen were left to wander and beg for charity with relative freedom; the violent ones, on the other hand, represented a danger for the community and for themselves and needed therefore to be kept under strict surveillance, as the thirteenth-century jurist Henry de Bracton explains.[192] Also in this case, the category in which the mad knights need to be placed is evident. Lancelot and Tristan are definitely dangerous as madmen, reacting violently towards anyone they meet.

As temporary and violent madmen, these mad knights need to be controlled and looked after, both because they represent a potential threat for themselves and the others, and because, as mentioned above, the care of lunatics, at least those belonging to the upper classes, was regulated by laws and conventions. For example, Lancelot is brought to sir Blyaunte's castle after the dwarf notices that a person with his beauty and strength must necessarily be a "man of grete worshyp" (MDA 605). The knight and his attendant realise that Lancelot probably belongs to the aristocracy and they exclude that a man with his strength and skill with the sword could be a natural fool. They therefore

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[192] George E. Woodbine (ed.), *Bracton, De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, vol. I, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942, p. 308.

bring him to the castle in order to look after him, without trying to find out his identity or where he comes from, even though in the French version Blyaunte and his brother are sorry for ignoring his real name (FL 42); this might be explained by the fact that the properties of the temporary madman were to be looked after by his family or by the king and sir Blyaunte is neither. During his whole permanence, in addition, Lancelot is dressed and fed properly, like a nobleman, since they never question his ultimate recovery from madness. Moreover, no one seems to condemn him for having attacked the knight of the pavilion in the forest, in accordance with the legal principle that the madman is not responsible for his actions, as explained in the anonymous thirteenth-century treatise *Fleta, seu Commentarius Juris Anglicani*.[193] Despite Blyaunte's generosity and nobility, considering that his first encounter with Lancelot is resolved with him being knocked unconscious by the mad knight, it seems more likely that his decision to look after him is a consequence more of his observance of the customary duties than of pity.

One of the most interesting details is that while in Blyaunte's castle Lancelot is initially chained. After saving his lord's life, he is freed from his bonds and allowed to move freely within the castle. Cruel as it might seem, the practice of chaining the madman was quite usual in medieval times, especially in the case of violent lunatics. Lancelot's case resembles the many episodes of mad criminals described in medieval chronicles. One of the most interesting, although late, is the case of Jehannecte Tropé, who after killing her husband was released from prison on the basis that, being insane, she was unable to understand what she was doing. Nevertheless, the customary laws of Normandy were invoked and once released from prison she was to be chained or constantly guarded, lest she could harm herself or others.[194] This procedure is reported

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[193] Henry Gerald Richardson, George Osborne Sayles (eds.) *Fleta, seu Commentarius juris Anglicani*, vol. iv, London: B. Quaritch, 1955, pp. 177-178; 181.

[194] Paul Le Cacheux (ed.), *Actes de la Chancellerie d' Henri VI concernant Normandie sous la*

also in the case of Margery Kempe, who was initially bound when in her madness she displayed very violent traits.

> Sche wold a fordon hirself many a tym at her steryngys and a ben damnyd wyth hem in helle. And into wytnesse therof sche bot hir owen hand so vyolently that it was seen al hir lyfe aftyr. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body agen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon other instrumentys, and wers sche wold a don saf sche was bowndyn and kept wyth strength bothe day and nygth that sche mygth not have hir wylle.[195]

If we consider the parallel of Jehannecte, we realise that Blyaunte's decision to remove Lancelot's chain is not a recognition of the fact that a human being deserves a better treatment, as the modern mentality might suggest, since the practice of chaining the madman was perceived as the best thing to do in these cases. It is rather an act of extreme gratitude and trust in the dog-like loyalty of Lancelot. Moreover, it represents a kind of inclusion of the mad hero in the lord's family, as from the moment he does so, Blyaunte is responsible for Lancelot's actions no less than if he were his brother. This seems confirmed by the fact that in the French version, when Lancelot runs after the boar, he is followed by Blyaunte's dwarf. He reaches Lancelot only when he has already been wounded by the boar and found by the hermit, to whom the dwarf explains that he was charged never to lose sight of the madman and to look after him (FL 44). From what is suggested by the pavilion scene, this dwarf seems to be Blyaunte's personal page, both because he lives in strict contact with his master and because Blyaunte does not hesitate to arm himself to defend him. Dwarf pages or squires are not unusual in Arthurian literature;[196] on the contrary they seem to represent a very precious and fashionable "accessory" in the knight's set of arms. In the *Tale of sir Gareth*, for example, when the knight's enemies try to set a trap for him in a castle, they use his dwarf squire as a bait (MDA 243-245). We therefore infer that Blyaunte means to

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[195] *Domination Anglaise (1422-1435)*, Tome I, Paris: A. Picard Fils et Cie, Libraires de la Société de l'École des Chartes, 1907, pp. 181-183.

[195] Barry Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006, p. 55.

[196] For further information on the status of dwarves in chivalric literature see Anne Martineau, *Le nain et le chevalier*, Paris: Presses Universitaires Paris Sorbonne, 2004.

honour Lancelot by assigning to one of his most important servants the task of looking after him.

The different attitudes towards the peaceful and the aggressive madman can be seen also in the episode of Tristan. When sir Dagonet reports to king Mark his fight with the madman of the wood, Mark initially supposes he might have met sir Matto, and takes no measures to contain the lunatic. When he hears that the wild fool has killed the giant, he decides that it would be wiser to capture him and if possible to have him healed (MDA 371-373). The killing of the giant definitely places Tristan in the category of the violent madmen, and the king consequently feels it necessary to keep the fool under control. Tristan's previous attack to Dagonet probably did not justify such urgent measures because the victim was in this case a fool himself and could have actually provoked the madman or exaggerated the violence of the attack. However, from the moment Tristan actually kills a powerful adversary, under the eyes of a king's knight, a reliable witness, the sovereign sees himself compelled to apply the law and prevent the madman from doing harm. When brought to court, in the Middle English version, Tristan is immediately looked after and he is soon restored to health and sanity (MDA 373). In the Old French text, he is kept under control, but the king gives instructions for him to be healed only after a dog recognises him, and Mark realises that the fool is his nephew (MRT 275-276). Since the relationship between Mark and Tristan cannot be defined as loving, we can infer that the king is here applying contemporary laws and customs rather than acting out of affection. Hence, while in the French text there is a definite difference between the duties of the king and those of the madman's family, Malory implies that it is the duty of the king to look after any madman among his subjects. A change in the attribution of guardianships for insane people is related in the *Fleta*. The anonymous author states that by his time, the king had taken over the

guardianship of insane people, a charge which in the past was generally assigned to the madman's family. According to the writer, this was done in order to protect the mentally disabled from family guardians more interested in inheritances than in their ward's welfare.

> Solent enim tutores terras *ydiotarum et stultorum* cum corporibus eorum custodire suo perpetuo, quod licitum fuit et permissum eo quod se ipsos regere non nouerunt, nam semper iudicabantur infra etatem vel quasi. Verum quia plures per hujusmodi custodiam exheredationem compatiebantur, provisum fuit et communiter concessum quod rex corporum et haereditatum hujusmodi idiotarum et stultorum sub perpetuo custodiam obtineret, dum tamen a nativitate fuerint idiotae et stulti, secus autem si tarde, a quocunque domino tenuerunt et ipsos maritaret et ex omni exhereditatione saluaret.[197]

> It is the custom to appoint guardians for the lands and persons of idiots and fools for the whole of their lives, and this has been lawful and permissible because of their inability of rule themselves, being adjudged ever to be, as if it were, below full age. But because they were suffering many disinheritings by reason of such wardships, it was provided and generally agreed that the king should have perpetual wardship of the persons and inheritance of such idiots and fools from whatsoever lord they held their lands[198]

In the case of Lancelot, this tension between the role of the king and the one of the family in the care of the madman seems to be still present to some extent, even if transposed in terms of efficiency. The hero receives attentive cares both in sir Blyaunte's castle and upon his arrival at King Pelles' court. However, the proper solution for his insanity is found only when he is recognised, and consequently accepted, among the members of his "family". Despite his devotion to Guinevere, Lancelot's relationship with Elayne appears to be perceived as nearly a marriage, at least by her and by king Pelles. As mentioned in the previous section, Elayne reminds the queen that Lancelot had taken her maidenhood and fathered Galahad (MDA 594-95), and after the knight has recovered from his insanity, king Pelles grants him a castle and suggests that he is honoured by his family's relation to Lancelot.

> "he shall be in the castell of Blyaunte and, there shall ye be wyth hym, and twenty of the fayryste yonge ladyes that bene in thys contrey, and they shall be of the grettyst blood in this contrey; and ye shall have twenty knyghtes wyth you. For, doughter, I woll that ye wyte

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[197] *Fleta*, vol. I, p. 21.
[198] *Fleta*, vol. I, p. 21.

we all be honowred by the blood of sir Lancelot." (MDA 611)

Both the king and his daughter therefore seem to assume that Lancelot belongs to their family. The association between family and healing of the madman is more evident in Malory than in the French version of the work, since in *Le Morte Darthur* the meeting between mad Lancelot and his brother Ector (FL 57) is omitted. Even though Lancelot escapes nearly as soon as they meet, in the French version, he is recognised by a family member long before he is healed, while in the Middle English version the two events coincide.

These episodes seem therefore to contain some echoes of the legal customs of the time but it is very likely that the influence could work also in the other direction. In at least one case, the defence of a man might have been based on the literary image of wild madness. In 1394, a remission letter was presented to the French royal court, asking official pardon for a man called Symmonnet de la Dert. According to the remission letter written for his case, this man, hearing from his neighbours that his wife had betrayed him and that his daughter had been accused of fornication, fell in a state of despair which led him to madness and then to suicide.[199] Suicide was not only sinful, but involved tragic consequences also for the dead man's family; all the properties were confiscated and the honour and respectability of the family in the community was definitely compromised. That is probably the reason why the widow and the daughter of Symmonnet wrote the remission letter; even if he obviously could not be executed, he was still considered a murderer. His family therefore recounted how after hearing the accusations, which according to the two women were false, Symmonnet lost his mind and after beating his wife and daughter ran to the wood were he remained two days.[200] It

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[199] Paris, Archives Nationales, JJ 146, ff. 83v-84r; for a more complete analysis of the case see Pfau, pp. 113-114.

[200] Paris, Archives Nationales, JJ 146, f. 83v.

is difficult to distinguish truth from rhetoric in the women's account, especially when one considers that they needed to convince the judge, but it is interesting to observe that to prove the man's madness, they inserted elements which can be found also in case of Lancelot and the other knights, such as aggressiveness and the flight to the wood.

The status of medieval madmen was therefore regulated by surprisingly detailed laws and conventions; these were aimed above all at establishing who was to look after them and what measures had to be taken in order to protect not only the lunatics and those around them but also their properties. The possible hints to these customs present in the case of Lancelot and the others suggest that the attentions they receive are not due to their having an important role in the Arthurian court, but represent the standard conduct in these cases. It is difficult to establish whether the audience knew the laws which regulated the status of madmen and to what extent. However, even though not everybody had a legal training, aristocratic readers were probably aware of the conventions concerning the administration of the madman's properties, and consequently also of those concerning wardships. In these romances, the characters' attitude towards the madman might have a didactic function. Nevertheless, none of the texts explicitly mentions a law which compels the characters to act in a determinate way; they seem to be either implying a custom or acting in what they believe to be the wisest way. If the writers inserted some references to the laws and customs of the time with a didactic purpose, they did not aim to provide the readers with information about the laws, but rather to set an example and to propose the code of conduct imposed by the laws and conventions of the time as the wisest and most magnanimous way to behave with a lunatic.

6
Wild Knights and Wild Archetypes

Archetype[201] is a slippery concept. It implies the creation of categories in which some elements should be included or not on the basis of common characteristics; at the same time, the relationship between an archetype and its possible derivations covers temporal and geographical areas so extended that variations of the distinctive traits are inevitable. Hence, in this research, the term *archetype* will necessary have to be used in its generic meaning and indicate an antecedent with similar characteristics which might have influenced these episodes of madness; it will not be considered in terms of a conscious imitation of a model.

For these episodes of madness different possible archetypes have been identified. In *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*,[202] Penelope Doop suggests that these mad knights might be regarded as deriving from the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who was punished by God with madness. Richard Bernheimer, in *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*,[203] includes these wild knights in the category of the wild man, a hairy monster very popular in medieval folklore. These, however, are not the only wild figures probably known to the medieval audience. In this chapter, two different types of archetype will be taken into account: the first group is constituted of figures which share some traits with the wild madman; the last figure presents some similarities with the mad knight not in terms of representation, but of development of the narrative structure.

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[201] For further information about the concept of archetype, see C. Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, New York: Princeton University Press, 1969 and Charlotte Spivack, Christine Herold (eds), *Archetypal Readings of Medieval Literature*, Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002.

[202] Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, pp. 137; 139-153.

[203] Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, New York: Octagon Books, 1979, p. 14.

6.1 Nebuchadnezzar: the Wild Mad King

The figure of Nebuchadnezzar presents some traits which can be found also in the mad knight; as described in the *Book of Daniel*, Nebuchadnezzar boasts of his power over his kingdom and is immediately rebuked and punished by God. During his madness, the Babylonian king is degraded to a sort of wild beast and lives in the forest, oblivious of his human nature.

> Omnia haec venerunt super Nabuchodonosor regem post finem mensium duodecim in aula Babylonis deambulabat responditque rex et ait "Nonne haec est Babylon magna quam ego aedificavi in domum regni in robore fortitudinis meae et in gloria decoris mei?". Cumque sermo adhuc esset in ore regis vox de caelo ruit "Tibi" dicitur "Nabuchodonosor rex Regnum tuum transibit a te et ab hominibus eiicient te et cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua foenum quasi bos comedes et septem tempora mutabuntur super te donec scias quod dominetur Excelsus in regno hominum et cuicumque voluerit det illud". Eadem hora sermo completus est super Nabuchodonosor et ex hominibus abiectus est et foenum ut bos comedit et rore caeli corpus eius infectum est donec capilli eius in similitudinem aquilarum crescerent et ungues eius quasi avium (Daniel 4: 25-30).

> All this came upon king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king said. "Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?" While the words were still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven: "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: the kingdom has departed from you! You shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like oxen, and seven times shall pass over you until you have learned that the most high has the sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will." Immediately the sentence was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven away from human society, ate grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers and his nails became like bird's claws.

After seven years, the king is miraculously healed, regains his sanity and is restored to his throne. Made wiser by this experience, he is determined to live the rest of his days as a humble servant of God (Daniel 4: 31-34). The episode constitutes a clear example of how God can punish sinners with insanity; thus, Christian authors were interested above all in the moral message contained in the story. Saint Jerome, for example, in his commentary, underlines the necessity to consider the story of Nebuchadnezzar as historically real, rather than as a metaphor, and indicates pride as the major theme of the episode.[204]

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[204] Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House,

In non-liturgical texts, such as Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale* (RC 243; lines 2143-2182) and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the episode is similarly presented with a very simple cause-and-consequence structure, and it is always made clear that the king's insanity is the direct punishment for his pride. Very little attention is paid to the actual madness; the authors generally seem more interested in describing his appalling sins or his subsequent repentance. This seems to confirm that Nebuchadnezzar's story was appreciated more for its didactic message, than for the readership's fascination for the king's wild life, even though this apparent lack of interest might be due to the popularity of the myth, which made it unnecessary to insert extra details about the king's madness. As can be seen in this passage, Gower focuses on Nabuchadnezzar's pride and on heavenly power and the king's wild life is described in few synthetic lines (lines 2840-2845).

> This proude kyng a wonder syhte
> Hadde in his swevene, ther he lay:
> Him thoghte, upon a merie day
> As he behield the world aboute,
> A tree fulgrowe he syh theroute,
> Which stod the world amiddes evene,
> Whos heihte straghte up to the hevene;
> [...]
> As he this wonder stod and syh,
> Him thoghte he herde a vois on hih
> Criende, and seide aboven alle:
> "Hew doun this tree and lett it falle,
> The leves let defoule in haste
> And do the fruit destruie and waste,
> And let of schreden every braunche,
> Bot ate Rote let it staunche.
> Whan al his Pride is cast to grounde,
> The rote schal be faste bounde,
> And schal no mannes herte bere,
> Bot every lust he schal forbere
> Of man, and lich an Oxe his mete
> Of gras he schal pourchace and ete,
> Til that the water of the hevene
> Have waisshen him be times sevene,
> So that he be thurghknowe ariht
> What is the heveneliche myht,
> And be mad humble to the wille
> Of him which al mai save and spille." (lines 2814- 2820; 2830-2849)[205]

1958, p. 513.
[205] Russell A. Peck, Andrew Galloway (eds.), *John Gower, Confessio Amantis*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Kalamazoo:

The figure of the Babylonian king shares some traits with the wild knight, such as madness and animal-like behaviour, and it is possible that, to some extent, it inspired the authors of these romances. However, some important differences must be taken into account. These divergences are partly due to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar and the wild knight belong to different genres, and do not exclude Nebuchadnezzar as one of the main archetypes for the wild knight, but they might help to realise how the creation of these episodes is probably much more complex and relies on other influences as well.

The aim of Nebuchadnezzar's story is that of exalting God's power over proud sinners but in the case of the Arthurian knights, divine power seems to be nearly absent. It is mentioned only in the story of Lancelot, who cannot recover in Sir Blyaunte's castle because it was not the will of God that he should be healed on that occasion (FL 39) and is later cured by the Grail.

One might look at these episodes as a courtly love transposition of the Nebuchadnezzar's myth: in the courtly love doctrine, the lady sometimes becomes the symbol of God.[206] However, after the initial scene of rebuke, the lady seems to have very little importance in the protagonist's madness. She is not even mentioned until the knight has regained his sanity; besides, even though the process of healing is connected with female figures, the end of the protagonist's insanity and the lady's forgiveness do not coincide. Guinevere realises that she has been too severe on Lancelot before he is restored to sanity (MDA 596), while Ywain (YG 105-106; lines 3965-3992) and Partonope (PB 332-333; lines 8221-8240) are actually forgiven only at the end of the romance, long after they have been healed.

In terms of narrative, while very little is said about what happens to the

Medieval Institute Publications, 2006, pp. 137-138.

[206] Jean Markale, *Courtly Love: The Path of Sexual Initiation* (*L'Amour Courtois*), Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 71.

Babylonian king during his madness, and the writer's attention is focused on the causes of his madness and subsequent repentance, in the Arthurian episodes we find the opposite approach. The scenes before and after the madness are extremely synthetic, and the writers concentrate on the mad protagonist and his friends, even suggesting that there might have been other works which contained longer sections about the madman (FL 60). These works probably never existed, and this could be simply a rhetorical device to amplify the adventures of the mad knight, but it definitely indicates that the audience was probably more intrigued by the actual madness than by its causes.

The narrative structure is different, but also the modalities of madness are not exactly the same. In the Biblical text, Nebuchadnezzar's exile from civilisation is clearly indicated as part of his punishment, and the king is looked for by his court only after he has completed the established period of punishment. This, as analysed in the previous chapter, is not what happens to Lancelot and the other knights, who are looked for by their friends and welcomed back even before being healed. If Nebuchadnezzar represents the prototype of the taboo-madman who needs to be excluded from society, lest his punishment be extended to others, the mad knight is something different. On the contrary, his absence creates sorrow and concern in the other members of the community.

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar's madness is presented in a very explicit fashion as a direct consequence for his sins; he loses his mind exactly as he finishes to pronounce his blasphemous speech. This is much less evident in the case of Lancelot and the other heroes, whose madness seems to derive from a more complex process, as analysed in Chapter 4.

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6.2 The Berserkir: the Wild Warriors from the North

Nebuchadnezzar certainly was the most famous analogue for wild madness, but it might be interesting to compare the wild knight also with the Nordic myth of the *berserkr* (pl. *berserkir*). The term *berserkr* probably derives from the Germanic root **ber-,* which means "bear", and the noun *serkr*, which indicates a shirt or a short robe.[207] These warriors were believed to be formidable killers in battle, since they were possessed by an uncontrollable fury and assumed an animal-like behaviour. The survival of this Viking myth in the Anglo-Norman area until the twelfth century is improbable but not impossible; David Wyatt observes that the protagonist of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* presents some of the traits of the berserk,[208] and a possible connection between the *berserkir* and the Arthurian knights has already been suggested.[209] The warriors of King Arthur's court often suffer from a sort of battle frenzy,[210] becoming wild and invincible like the Norse fighters.

As the etymology of the name reveals, boldness and aggressiveness are not the only traits which the *berserkir* share with wild beasts. Sometimes, in order to become a *berserkr*, the warrior needs to wear an animal skin. This happens for instance in the *Saga of the Volsungs*; while in the wood, Sinfjotli and his father Sigmund find a pair of wolf-skins and as soon as they wear them, they become *berserkirs*.

> One time, they went again to the forest to get themselves some riches, and they found a house. Inside it were two sleeping men, with thick gold rings. A spell had been cast upon them: wolfskins hung over them in the house and only every tenth day could they shed the skins. They were the sons of kings. Sigmund and Sinfjotli put the skins on and could not get them off. And the weird power was there as before: they howled like wolves, both understanding the sounds. Now they set out into the forest, each going his own way.[211]

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[207] Luisa Oitana, *I berserkir tra realtà e leggenda*, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2006, p. 1.

[208] David R. Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland: 800-1200*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 101-102.

[209] Markale, *Lancelot*, pp. 194-195; Vincent Samson, *Les Berserkir, Les Guerriers-Fauves, dans La Scandinavie Ancienne, de l'Âge de Vendel aux Vikings (VIe-XIe Siècle)*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2011, p. 225.

[210] Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 144.

[211] Jesse L. Byock (ed.), *Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*, trans. Jesse

As can be seen from this passage, the *berserkr* is something between a man and an animal; as a consequence he often prefers wild environments, like Lancelot and the other madmen. Seeing in the wild knight an echo of the *berserkr* might be tempting, but there are some problematic aspects. Although uncontrollable, the *berserkir* were generally connected with battle and these warriors probably constituted an official branch of the Norse army.[212] Hence, even though being a *berserkr* was considered dangerous, it was an invaluable quality for a fighter. Besides, when out of struggling contexts, these warriors are often described as "powerful".[213] This does not happen to the wild knight; despite his strength in combat, he does not fight against a declared enemy, but directs his aggressiveness randomly towards any man or animal he sees. Unlike the *berserkr*, the wild knight is not a better warrior because of his madness, and his animal-like aggressiveness does not help him to improve his role in society; on the contrary, it definitely represents a regression for him and a loss for the rest of his community, since the mad knight can be employed, at best, as a clown but not as a fighter. Finally, while the madness of the wild knight is temporary and generally occurs only once in his life, the *berserkir* remain such throughout their lives, even though their aggressiveness might be more evident on some particular occasions. Hence, although the *berserkr* seems to share some characteristics with the mad knight, they seem due to the fact that they both evoke the ancestral idea that something out of the social rules, such as a madman or a frenzied warrior, is somehow wild.

L. Byock, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, p. 45.

[212] Jens Peter Schjødt, "The Warrior in Old Norse Religion", Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, Ian Beuermann (eds.), *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 269- 296, p. 282.

[213] Oitana, p. 54.

6.3 The Hermit: the Wild Holy Man

Another figure which bears some resemblance with the wild knight is the hermit. Like the mad knight, the hermit generally lives outside civilised environments. Sometimes, the hermit is depicted as a wild man, as can be seen in the *Smithfield Decretals*,[214] a fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript containing the *Decretals of Gregory IX*, or in the various representations of John the Baptist or of Saint Mary of Egypt. Besides, the holy man is not always alien to the idea of madness. Saint Francis of Assisi defined himself "God's clown", and authors like Jacopone da Todi saw in mystic madness a way to understand God.[215]

As anticipated in the section about the wild environment, however, the hermit and the wild knight do not seem related to each other. Unlike the hermit, the mad knight does not choose isolation deliberately, but he dwells in the wilderness only because in his madness he escapes from civilisation; as a consequence, he abandons the wood as soon as he goes back to sanity, and sometimes even earlier. Some Arthurian knights actually decide to join a hermit in penance - Lancelot himself is said to end his days as a priest, after repenting for his sins, in a hermitage in the forest (MDA 877) - but this is generally done with the protagonist's consent. Similarly, the mad knight does not share the same aura of holiness typical of the religious hermit, but is perceived as something fearful, because of his aggressive attitude, or grotesque, to the point that both Tristan and Lancelot are treated as fools. Sometimes, the wild knight actually meets a hermit (MDA 607-608; YG 45-46; lines 1671-1708); when this happens, it is evident that the mad knight represents the hermit's uncivilised and negative counterpart. In nearly all cases, the holy man fears the wild man and then tries to change his condition, as

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[214] London, British Library, Royal Ms 10 E IV, ff. 113v-118v (known as the Smithfield Decretals), ff 117v-118r; 131v-134v.

[215] For further information see Jean-Marie Fritz, *Le Discours du fou au Moyen Âge, xiiie-xiiie siècles, Étude comparée des discours littéraire, médical, juridique et théologique de la folie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992, pp. 305-319; Henri Queffélec, *François d'Assise, Le Jongleur de Dieu*, Paris: Calmann-Lévi, 1982.

happens for instance in *Ywain and Gawain*, where the hermit reintroduces civilised food in the madman's diet. The fact that the hermit and the wild knight are often opposed suggests that their similarities were evident also to the medieval readers. This is not surprising, but it appears that they were felt as two opposed figures. The hermit renounces a sinful world for a life of spiritual elevation, while the mad knight is deprived of the civilised world and lives in a degraded and animal-like manner.

The distance between the hermit and the other wild archetypes is exemplified in one of the anecdotes contained in Walter Map's collection *De Nugis Curialium.*

Philippus Neapolitanus, uir illustris, nobis retulit, quod cum in Nigra Montana uenatu uenisset uirum siluestrem pilosum et deformem fonti recumbantem ut biberet repente per pilos sublimem rapuit, querens quis esset et quid ibi. Ille autem mansuetudine sua dimitti meruit, et ait: "Venimus ad hanc solitudinem tres, ut hic penitens antiquorum fie/remus imitatores patrum; primus nostrum et optimus Francus, secundus et me longe forcior et longanimior Anglicus, ego Scotus. Francus tante perfectionis est, quod de uita ipsius loqui pertimesco; excedit enim fidem. Anglicus, sed angelicus, cathena stringitur ferrea, tam longa ut rotendi possit ad pedem septimum. Malleum autem secum ferreum et axillum semper gestat, quibus affirmat tere cathenam suam in sabbato, et intra modicos illos fines per ebdomodam orat totus in hymnis et leticia, et numquam querulus aut tristis. Ibi comedens quod repperit, sabbato castra mouet non uagus sed loci querens amenitatem, non ubertatem, non remotum ab aeris importunitate sinum ubi uictus aliquid secus aquam obuenerit, cum gaudio metatur; quem si uidere libet, super huius riuulum fontis hac facit ebdomoda resistenciam." His dictis ferina uelocitate recessit ab ipso. Neapolitanus autem Anglicum intervallo paruulo mortuum repperit, et ob reuerenciam uirtutum eius nec ipsum nec quicquam de suo tangere presumpsit, sociisque suis dignitatem sepulture commendas abscessit. Hic fontem leticie Christum pectore gerebat Anglicus, cui nullam potuit infligere tristiciam angustia. Sint ypocrite sic, ut ait Dominus, tristes, quia perfecta caritas foras mittit cum tristicia timorem.[216]

The illustrious Philip of Newtown told me that when he was going hunting in the Black Mountain, he came on a wild man covered with hair and uncouth to see, lying down by a spring to drink, whom he seized by the hair and lifted up, asking who he was and what he did there. By his quietness he induced his captor to let him down again, and then said: "There are three of us who have come to this solitude to do penance here and be followers of the old fathers. The first and best of us is French; the second, far stronger and more patient than I, English; I am a Scot (Irishman?). The Frenchman is of such perfection that I am afraid to tell of his life: it goes beyond belief. The Englishman - rather angel - is bound with an iron chain so long as to stretch seven feet and he always carries about an iron hammer and peg, with which he fixes his chain in the ground every Saturday, and within that small compass prays for a week, absorbed in hymns and rejoicing, never complaining or sad. He eats what he finds there and moves his camp on the Saturday, not at random, but looking for a pleasant place, not specially fertile, nor yet for a nook sheltered from the weather; and wherever he may find food in the neighborhood of water, gratefully gathers. If you would see him, he is keeping his residence this week on the stream that flows from this spring." With this he made off, swift as a wild creature. The man of Newtown after a little time found the Englishman dead, and out of respect for his virtues did not presume to touch him or aught that was his, but left him, enjoining his company to give him worthy burial.

[216] M. R. James (ed.), *De Nugis Curialium, Courtiers' Trifles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 130.

> This Englishman, whom no hardship could sadden, bore Christ, the spring of gladness, in his bosom. Yes, let hypocrites, as the Lord says, be of a sad countenance, for perfect love casteth out not only fear but sadness.[217]

Although he has the aspect of a wild man (*uirum siluestrem*), the hermit is perfectly capable of producing a sensible explanation for his situation. In addition, it is clear that his being similar to a wild creature is somehow connected to the fact that he is the "least holy" of the three anchorites. This is suggested not only by his description of the other men's penitences, but also by the different attitude the protagonist has towards the hermits: he treats the first one like a wild animal, but refrains from touching the body of the second, out of respect for his sanctity.

The mad knight and the hermit therefore have some common characteristics, but it seems unlikely that these traits might be due to a direct influence. It is more probable that the similar representation of the mad knight and of the hermit depends on the fact that both these figures are somehow connected with the wild man and with the forest.

6.4 Wild Men and Wild Knights

The wild man, or *woodwose,* is a popular figure from medieval folklore. He is a primitive creature who lives outside civilised society or at its margins, generally in the forest or in a cave. The *woodwose* is for example mentioned among the monsters Sir Gawain fights in the wood while searching for the Green Knight.

> Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werrez, and with wolues als,
> Sumwhyle wyth **wodwos**, þat woned in þe knarrez,
> Boþe wyth bullez and berez, and borez oþerquyle,
> And etaynez, þat hym anelede of þe heȝe felle (SG 64; lines 720-723)

In medieval romance, the *woodwose* is therefore perceived as something between a monster, like the dragon (*werrez),* and an animal, like the wolf, the bear and the boar,

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[217] *De Nugis Curialium*, p. 131.

and is thus classified among the dangerous and aggressive inhabitants of the wood.

The wild man is very ugly to behold; his main physical characteristic is the abundance of hair all over his body, but he can also present a deformed aspect. At the beginning of *Ywain and Gawain*, Calogerant describes the opponents he has faced while trying to conquer the magic fountain. One of these, the Giant Herdsman, is a perfect example of wild man; he is a gigantic being with an overgrown beard, but his features seem far from those of a human being. He has enormous ears, a misshapen nose and long teeth.

> I saw sone whare a man sat
> On a lawnd, the fowlest wight
> That ever yit man saw in syght.
> He was a lathly creature,
> For fowl he was out of mesure;
> A wonder mace in hand he hade,
> And sone mi way to him I made.
> His hevyd, me thoght, was als grete
> Als of a rowncy or a nete;
> Unto his belt hang his hare,
> And efter that byheld I mare.
> To his forhede byheld I than,
> Was bradder than twa large span;
> He had eres als ane olyfant
> And was wele more than geant.
> His face was ful brade and flat;
> His nese was cutted als a cat;
> His browes war like litel buskes;
> And his tethe like bare tuskes.
> A ful grete bulge opon his bak -
> Thare was noght made withowten lac.
> His chin was fast until his brest;
> On his mace he gan him rest.
> Also it was a wonder wede,
> That the cherle yn gede;
> Nowther of wol ne of line
> Was the wede that he went yn.
> […]
> "What ertow, belamy?"
> He said ogain, "I am a man."
> I said, "Swilk saw I never nane." (YG 7-8; lines 244-270; 278-280)

Once again, the wild man is closer to the animal kingdom than to the human species; each part of his body is compared to that of an animal, to the point that Calogerant feels compelled to ask him whether he is a man or not. We learn from the French version of

the romance that the *wonder wede* that the Giant Herdsman is wearing is made from the skin of two bulls or two oxen (CL, 14; line 313). This detail underlines the massive stature of the Giant Herdsman, but it also evokes the strange attire of the wild man, who is traditionally dressed with fur, or with animal skins, or with foliage and sometimes is even covered only by his own hair. The *woodwose* and the mad knight share some characteristics, such as the preference for wild places, aggressiveness and lack of clothes. Besides, they are both alien to laws and social conventions; the first does not know them because he has always lived outside it, and the latter is unable to understand them because of his lack of reason.

Despite his being, as William D. Wixom observes, "all that medieval man hoped he was not",[218] the wild man was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages. He often appears not only in literature, but also in art and heraldry. It is therefore natural to think that two popular themes, such as the wild man and the mad knight, with similar characteristics, might have been perceived as correlated. However, the characteristics of the mad knight so far analysed can have other explanations rather than a direct influence of an archetype. It is therefore interesting to analyse to what extent the wild man and the wild knight are linked.

The myth of the wild man has very ancient origins; the first literary example of wild man is Enkidu, one of the protagonists of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, probably composed around the eighteenth century B. C. Subsequent examples of wild men are documented in all the Eurasian area and in nearly every epoch. Even the medieval canonised *woodwose* was present in a very large area, even though the myth seems to have flourished more in mountainous areas, such as Germany or Switzerland.[219] The episode of the mad knight had likewise a very wide circulation, even though in a more

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[218] Timothy Husband, Gloria Gilmore-House, *The Wild Man, Medieval Myth and Symbolism*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980, p. vii.
[219] Husband, p. 2.

limited span of time. The oldest texts where this type of madness occurs are the *Vita Merlini* and the *Serglige Con Culainn*, therefore we cannot be sure of the presence of similar episodes before the tenth century, but some of the later romances, such as the *Roman de Tristan* or *Partonopeus de Blois* were translated into many languages, thus granting to the figure of the mad knight a wide circulation in Europe. If some of the wild features of the knight's madness are the result of an influence of the myth of the wild man, it is very unlikely that this might be an attempt to adapt the episode to the culture of a specific area.

Another important observation needs to be made; because of its wide circulation, the myth of the wild man underwent many metamorphoses throughout history, even though the basic traits were maintained, namely the fact of being outside civilisation and to ignore its conventions. These characteristics constitute what we will call the macro-archetype of the wild man; despite their differences, Enkidur, Nebuchadnezzar, John the Baptist and the Giant Herdsman can all be included in this category. Penelope Doob then groups the many figures of wild men into two main categories: holy wild men and unholy wild men. The first group includes figures like John the Baptist and the other hermits, which have been analysed in the previous section. The unholy wild men, on the contrary, are generally negative or, at the best, ambiguous figures, like Merlin, and do not give up civilisation for religious purposes.[220] As far as medieval European culture is concerned, the group of the unholy wild men can be further divided into two categories. One is that of the *woodwose*, the "wood dweller". He is generally covered with fur, often of gigantic dimensions, monstrous, aggressive, and he carries a club. The other category includes all those men or populations which, according to medieval writers, are not civilised, and consequently labelled as "wild men". Sometimes, in medieval imagination, the representation of the foreigner and that of the folklore monster

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[220] Doob, pp. 158-164 .

coincide, on other occasions, they differ in some traits. Lancelot and the other mad knights can be included in the macro-archetype of the wild man; their lack of sense automatically places them outside civilisation and their disregard for social conventions constitutes the main trait which allows the others to define them as "mad". This ontological state is reinforced by their being physically outside the civilised world and its rules, since they live in the wilderness. It has already been made clear that, on the other hand, they do not belong to the category of the holy wild men. The aim of this section is to analyse what could be the possible correlations between the wild knights and the two figures of unholy wild men popular in medieval literature: the *woodwose* and the uncivilised man.

In the texts analysed, there are only three explicit comparisons between the mad knight and the *woodwose*. The first can be found in *Partonope of Blois*; after he has been nursed back to health by Urake, the protagonist is said to have abandoned "the wodwouse life" (PB 306; line 7691). The second is in *Owain, or the Lady of the Fountain*, the Welsh version of *Ywain and Gawain*, where during his madness the protagonist grows hair all over his body.[221] Finally, in *Le Dit du Prunier*, the protagonist is said to be so hairy and wild in his aspect that those who see him cannot decide whether he is a bear or a wild man until he shows them his ring (lines 1231-1258).[222] It is possible that in the other episodes of wild madness, an explicit comparison was not needed, since the audience would easily recognise the resemblance with such a popular figure as the *wodwouse*; the Giant Herdsman, for example, is never defined as a wild man. It is however interesting that a very synthetic expression to describe the protagonist's experience in the forest, such as "wodwouse life", should be used only in one case. For the medieval audience, the connection between wild man and mad knight

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[221] Gwyn Jones, Thomas Jones (ed.), *The Mabinogion*, London: Dent, 1989, p. 174.
[222] Pierre-Yves Badel (ed.), *Le Dit du Prunier*, Genève: Droz, 1985, pp. 81-82.

might have been less immediate than we expect.

The main element which these two figures have in common is the preference for wild environments. However, as analysed in the previous chapter, in the case of the mad knight the forest is not the main setting, and the protagonist does not take refuge there because he has been exiled from society. Unlike the mad knight, the *woodwose* lives outside civilised society because he is not accepted into it. Besides, when the *woodwose* and the civilised man meet, the fight is generally caused by an assault on the part of the wild man, or after the wild man has somehow violated the limits of his condition and has, for example, kidnapped a maid or a child. On the other hand, when the mad knight attacks someone, although he displays an extremely aggressive attitude, this happens after he has been disturbed or he thinks he is being threatened. He never invades the sphere of civilisation, but is, on the contrary, chased by that civilised world he has abandoned.

For both Tristan and Lancelot, the duels they engage during their madness follow a standard pattern; the mad knight manages to get hold of a sword and assails his opponent, who tries to defend himself until he is struck by a violent blow on his head.

> [Tristan] ran thydir and **gate sir** Dagonet **by the hede**, and there he gaff hym such a falle to the erthe and brused hym so that he lay stylle. (MDA 371)
>
> Than sir Trystram was ware of the swerde of the knyght thereas hit lay, and so thydir he ran and toke up the swerde and smote to sir Tauleas, and so **strake of hys hede**, and so he yode hys way to the herdemen. (MDA 373)
>
> […] and whan sir Launcelot saw hym com so armed wyth hys swerde in hys honde, than sir Launcelot flowght to hym with such a myght, and **smote hym uppon the helme suche a buffet**, that the stroke troubled his brayne, and therewythall the swerde brake in three. (MDA 605)

The detail of the blow on the head apparently resembles the way of fighting of the wild man. As mentioned above, the traditional weapon of the *woodwose* is the wooden club. Medieval writers never focus on how the *woodwose* uses his weapon, but it is

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reasonable to assume that the most efficient way of defeating the adversary was to strike him violently on the most vulnerable parts of the body, like the head. Lancelot and Tristan apparently act like wild men. The blow on the head, however, is not so unusual in the descriptions of fights between Arthurian knights. In his attempt to free sir Persydes, Percival defeats his adversary giving him a mighty "buffette".

> And so mette that knyght in myddys the brydge, ans sir Percyvale gaff hym suche a **buffette** that he smote hym quyte frome hys horse and over a parte of the brydge (MDA 601)

Even though to the modern eye a blow on the head might seem an inelegant way of winning a fight, it was the most practical strategy to kill the adversary. In order to inflict a fatal wound it was necessary to pierce the adversary's protections, and this was possible only in precise points of the body, such as the junctures of arms and legs, which were covered only by the mail coat without the armour plates. Medieval swords might have been lighter than popular belief depicts them,[223] but the armour probably did not allow excessive precision when striking; besides, the visibility through the helmet was reduced. Hence, one can imagine how hitting precisely these parts was not a simple task. Striking the adversary on the head with the sword was considerably easier and more effective, as the head represents a target more visible than an armpit or the back of the knees, and a strong blow could provoke the death of the opponent even without actually cutting through his helmet. In *Ysaÿe le Triste*, for example, the hermit Sarban, while teaching to the young protagonist how to fight with the sword, indicates the head as the best target and the first part to protect in a duel.

> "Beaux fieus, quant je yrai contre vous, si sacquiès vostre espee et m'en frapès en la teste, se vous poès" [...] et Sarban met l'escu desuer son cief pour recepvoir le cop. (YT 42)

> "My dear son, when I attack you, try, if you can, to pull up your sword and hit me on the head" […] and Sarbat put his shield over his head to receive the blow (translation mine)

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[223] L. J. Andrew Villalon, Donald J. Kagay (eds.), *The Hundred Years War: A Wider Focus*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p. 462.

The *buffet* on the head is therefore not such a primitive fighting technique as might be expected; on the contrary, it is what a skilled and well trained knight is supposed to achieve in a duel. Hence, in the case of Lancelot and Tristan, ending the duel with a blow on the adversary's head is not an action which characterises them as uncivilised men, but is a gesture which allows them to be recognised as trained warriors. Let us not forget that, even when they are in disguise, these Arthurian knights are often recognised from their manner of fighting, as happens to Lancelot in *The Fair Maid of Astolat*. The protagonist is willing to take part in a tournament organised by king Arthur, but cannot reveal his identity, since he has formerly refused to participate in order to remain in Camelot with the queen. He borrows a shield from an old knight who has offered him hospitality, and thus disguised he fights in the tournament; out of gratitude towards the old knight, Lancelot fights on his side against king Arthur's court. Nevertheless, Gawain recognises him by his way of fighting.

> "Sir", seyde sir Gawayne, "I wolde sey hit were sir Launcelot **by hys rydynge and hys buffettis** that I se hym deale." (MDA 762)

Nowhere in these episodes of madness do the writers suggest that the protagonist is fighting in a brutish way or using uncivilised weapons. We are not told how Ywain attacks the man in the forest, but after that episode we know he is armed with bow and arrows (YG 45; lines 1657-1662); an archer might be less noble than a knight, especially if, like Ywain, he uses these weapons to hunt for food and not in battle, but he is still considered a member of the civilised world. Lancelot and Tristan, as mentioned above, generally fight with a sword, the proper weapon for the knight. Although they share with the wild man the characteristic of being aggressive, the way in which they manifest this aggressiveness is not far from that of a warrior in possession of his faculties.

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Wild setting, lack of clothes and aggressiveness are not the only points of contact between the *woodwose* and the wild knight. These madmen are often described as "wyld" and this might have reinforced the connection with the figure of the wild man. When he meets sir Dagonet, for example, Tristan is said to run towards him "as he had bene wyld wode" (MDA 371); Lancelot and Ywain as well are defined as "wyld woode" (MDA 594; 604; YG 126; line 1650) during their madness. Nevertheless, the range of meaning of the Middle English "wyld" was wider than its modern correspondent. The adjective could be used to describe something or someone that is not civilised, but could also mean simply "mad". In *Arthour et Merline*, to describe Merlin's anger at seeing his mother treated unfairly, the writer says that he was "neȝe wilde" (line 1046).[224] Similarly, in one of the tales from *The Seven Sages of Rome*, Hippocrates' nephew is sent by his uncle to visit the sick son of the king of Hungary; after examining him, he realises that he is a bastard and asks the queen who is the real father of the prince. She is initially abashed by the question and asks him if he is mad.

> "Dame, he saide, be aknawe
> What man had biȝete þis chil?"
> "What, ȝe saide, artou **wild**?
> Who schulde him biȝete but þe king?" (lines 1044-1047)[225]

At the beginning of *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, when the empress dies, her husband goes mad with grief and he is described as "wyld of redd" (line 35).[226] In the *Owl and the Nightingale*, on the other hand, the nightingale uses the term "wild" to describe the uncivilised people of other nations.

> Þat lond is grislich and unuele
> Þe men boþ **wilde** and unisele (lines 1003-1004)

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[224] O. D. Macrae-Gibson (ed.), *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, vol. I, London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 81.

[225] Karl Brunner (ed.), *The Seven Sages of Rome (Southern Version)*, London: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 41.

[226] Wilhelm Vietor (ed.), *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1893, p. 2.

He miȝte bet teche ane bore
To weȝe boþe sheld and spere,
 Þan me þat **wilde** folc ibringe
 Þat hi me wolde ihere singe. (lines 1021-1024)[227]

The idea of both wilderness and madness can be expressed by the same adjective, but the two meanings seem to imply a difference in its use. As can be seen from the examples so far mentioned, when "wyld" means "mad" it is generally inserted in phrases such as "wyld and wode" or "wyld in the mode" or "in the rede" or accompanied by modifiers indicating quantity, like "wexe wyld" or "so wyld" or "neyȝe wyld". This does not happen when the adjective expresses an uncivilised nature; in these cases it is employed alone and seems to have no gradation. This suggests that the two concepts expressed were not completely equivalent and that in the case of the mad knights the adjective is to be understood as a synonym of "insane". Besides, in the French originals, the corresponding phrases to describe the protagonist's insanity seem to have no connection with the idea of wilderness. They indicate a lack of reason, as in "com cil ki toute raison avoit perdue" (MRT 250), or the state of being out of one's mind and of having no memory, like "fors de sens et del memoire" (FL 21), or simply the action of going mad with verbs like "forsener" (CL 224; line 2809). The use of the adjective "wyld" to express the idea of madness certainly might have contributed to reinforce the connection between these mad knights and the figure of the wild man, but the term seems here used simply to indicate a lack of reason without implying any ambiguity.

"Wild" is not the only possible linguistic coincidence between the mad knight and the wild man. As mentioned above, the common Middle English name for the wild man is *woodwose*. This name contains the term *wode*, used both to indicate the forest and as an adjective meaning "mad".[228] However, the traditional wild man is generally

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227 Neil Cartlidge (ed.), *The Owl and the Nightingale, Text and Translation*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001, p. 25.
228 For further information on the use of the term "wod"/"wode" see Marie-Francoise Alamichel, "Wod et

called "woodewose", or "wodewose", or "wylde man" or even "savage man", while "wode man" is an expression usually employed to indicate the madman. This is clear for instance in the episode of Lancelot. When Elayne decides she wants to see the madman, she declares that she wants to see the "woode man". At that point of the story, Lancelot no longer presents a wild aspect, as we learn that he has been dressed "as a knight"; besides, no one is actually aware that he has been living in the wood before arriving in King Pelles' palace. It is therefore more likely that with the expression "wode man" she simply means the "madman". Moreover, as already noted for the adjective "wylde", the original French versions of these texts never present a corresponding idea of wilderness implied in the terms concerning madness. The points of contact are sufficient to show how wild man and mad knights could be felt as similar, and since the first was extremely popular in British culture, it is not impossible to imagine that the translators might have chosen terms like "wode" or "wylde" to give an even more immediate image of an aggressive and uncontrolled insanity. However, as Marie Françoise Alamichel observes, the Old- and Middle- English vocabulary to indicate madness is extremely limited.[229] The Old English had terms like *gemad*, from which the modern "mad" comes; otherwise, words with privative suffixes, like *ungemynd* and *ungewittignes*, or *gewitlaes*, could be employed to describe a lack of reason. Middle English writers use the adjectives "woode" and "wylde", or expressions like "out of his/her mind/wit" or the term "foole", which however seems used more to indicate the natural fool or the professional fool. When considering this, the possibility of a deliberate choice on the part of the translator to create ambiguity appears quite improbable. Moreover, the figure of the *woodwose* was no more popular in Britain than in France; as can be seen from historiographical sources and iconographic representations, the dance of the wild men

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Wude dans la Littérature Médiévale Anglaise ou l'Espace de la Folie", *Le Moyen-âge*, 113, 2007, pp. 361-382.

[229] Alamichel, pp. 361-362.

was extremely appreciated at the French court. In Froissart's *Chronicles*,[230] we read that during one of these performances organised in 1393 by Charles VI, the Duke of Orléans was so enraptured that got too close to the dancers with his torch and set fire to one of them. The episode, known as "le Bal des Ardents", is represented in the manuscript of the *Grands Chroniques de France* (fig. 14),[231] where the dancing wild men correspond to the traditional representation of the *woodwose*, as they are dressed in foliage and dancing with wooden staffs. If with these episodes of madness the writers had intended to echo the figure of the *woodwose*, it is likely that they would have inserted a more explicit allusion to it in the original French texts.

Merlin probably represents the most evident point of contact between the wild man and the madman. In the *Vita Merlini* he experiences a sort of wild madness, and in later texts, he is described as a *woodwose.* Sometimes, some details indicating madness are maintained in the later *woodwose*-Merlin; in the *Tale of Grisandole*, for example, he is said to "rore lowde as a man wood oute of mynde" (PM 228). However, Merlin is always connected with the idea of wisdom, even when he is presented as a wild man or as a madman. In the *Vita Merlini*, where he is described as mad, his statements always correspond to the truth, even if they are initially mistaken for nonsense. After being accused of having betrayed her husband, Merlin's sister Ganieda tries to prove that her brother's statements are due to his madness. She shows him a boy and asks him to predict how the lad will die. Merlin first answers that the boy will find his death falling from a high rock; the boy is disguised and presented to the prophet twice again. The second time he sees him, Merlin affirms that he will die on a tree and the third that he shall drown. Everybody agrees that the madman's statements are not to be trusted until, years later, the same boy slips from a rock during a hunt. He falls in the river, where he

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[230] J. A. Buchon (ed.), *Collection des Chroniques Nationales Françaises, Écrites en Langue Vulgaire du Trezième au Seizième Siècle*, vol. xiii, Paris: Librairie Verdière, 1825, pp. 140-147.

[231] London, British Library, Harley Ms 4380, f. 1r.

drowns, but one of his feet gets caught in a tree, thus fulfilling Merlin's prophecy (DM 76-78; 82-84). Similarly, in the *Tale of Grisandole*, Merlin is asked to explain his previous strange behaviour.

> "I wolde wite," quod he, "wherefore thow didst laughe when thow were in the foreste and loked on Grisandolus; and also whan thow were ledde before an abbey; and in the chapell whan the squyer smote his lorde; and why thow seidest tho wordes to my stiwarde when he asked why thow loughe; and after, telle me what betokeneth the laughter hereynne whan thow saugh the emperesse come." "Sir," seide the savage man, "I shall telle yow inowgh. I do yow to wite that the firste laughter that I made was for that a woman hadde me taken by her engyn, that no man cowde not do. And wite ye well that Grisandolus is the beste maiden and the trewest withynne youre reame; and therefore was it that I lough. And the laughter that I made before the abbey was for ther is under erthe before the yate the grettest tresour hidde that eny man knoweth; and therfore I lough for that it was under feet ofhem that aboode after the almesse. For more richesse is in that tresour than alle the monkes beth worth, and all the abbey, and all that therto belongeth. And the pore peple that theron stoden cowde it not take. And Avenable your stywarde, that Grisandolus doth her clepen, saugh that I lowgh and asked me wherefore. And the coverte wordes that I to hir spake was for that she was chaunged into the fourme of man, and hadde take anothir habite than hir owne. And alle the wordes that I spake thei ben trewe, for by woman is many a man disceyved." (PM 235-236)

Merlin's apparently nonsensical actions are generally later revealed to be due to his wisdom; the comic effect is here similar to the episode narrated in the *Folie Tristan*. Tristan's disguise as a fool allows him not only to enter King Mark's court, but also to speak openly to the queen about their affair despite the presence of her husband, who mistakes Tristan's attempts to make himself unequivocally known to Isolde for the delirious discourse of a madman (FT 10-15; lines 311-540). This is the same type of humour which can be found in later figures of fools, such as the Shakespearean ones. Lancelot and the other mad knights never use their status as madmen to affirm some forbidden truth; on the contrary, they hardly talk, and, when they do, their words seem simply aimed to confirm their insanity. In *Le Mort d'Arthur*, for example, the only time Lancelot speaks is when he meets the hermit after being wounded by the boar.

> Then the hermit turned agayne and asked sir Lancelot how he was hurte. "A, my fealow" seyde sir Lancelot, "this boore hath byttyn me sore!" "Than com ye wyth me," seyde the ermyte, "and I shall heale you" "Go thy way," seyde sir Lancelot, "and deale nat wyth me!" (MDA 607)

The protagonist's statements are not incomprehensible or without sense, but simply inappropriate for that precise context. Similarly, during his madness, Tristan takes part in a dialogue only when the shepherds ask him to save a knight from the giant, and he only says "helpe ye hym" (MDA 373). Hence, the medieval wild man seems to evoke more the figure of the jester than the madman.

As analysed in the previous chapter, some of the characteristics of the wild knight suggest a possible connection with demonic possession. The figure of the wild man seems to be similarly linked to demonic forces. His belonging to the category of folkloric monsters probably made him a potential servant of Satan, as happened for the fairies and the dragons.[232] Samuel Kinser, in his article "Why is Carnival so Wild?",[233] reminds us that the wild man was an important presence in many German Carnival festivities. In north west Germany and along the Baltic Sea, in the cities and towns of the Hanseatic League, this figure had a very specific name: *schoduvel,* which contains the noun *duvel*, the low German for *devil.* Some similarities between the devil and the wild man can be found also in how they were represented. One of the popular names for the devil was *Old Hairy,*[234] and medieval limners generally depicted him as having animal-like traits and a body covered with hair, as can be seen for example in the *Smithfield Decretals* (fig. 15);[235] these characteristics made his appearance not far from that of the wild man. The occasional equivalence between the wild man and the devil can be seen for instance in the *Prose Merlin*. While at the beginning of the book (PM 19-24), Merlin is said to be the son of a young woman impregnated by a demon, in another episode, when asked why his aspect is so wild he answers that he was born from

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[232] Jeffrey B. Russell, *Il diavolo nel Medioevo* (*Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Age*) , trans. F. Cezzi, Bari: Editori Laterza, 1987, p. 42.

[233] Samuel Kinser, "Why is Carnival So Wild?", Konrad Eisenbichler, Wim Hùsken (eds.), *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: the Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, pp. 43-88, p. 55.

[234] Jeffrey Russell, p. 45.

[235] *Smithfield Decretals*, f. 247r.

the union of a woman and a wild man.

> This is the trouthe, that my moder on a day com from the market of a town. And it was late when she entred into the Foreste of Brocheland, and wente oute her wey so fer that the same nyght behoved hir to lye in the foreste. And whan she saugh she was so alone be hirself, she was afeerde, and lay down under an oke and fill aslepe. And than com a savage man oute of the foreste and by hir lay because she was sool by hirself. Durste she not hym diffende, for a woman aloone is feerfull. And that nyght was I begeten on my moder. (PM 231)

Although he shares possible connections with the devil, the mad knight does not seem to be as dangerous and negative as the wild man. Besides, the wild man is generally monstrous; when Calogerant meets the Giant Herdsman, he feels compelled to ask whether he is a man or not, since his deformed aspect apparently excludes him from the human race. Similarly, when Julius Caesar meets Merlin in the *Tale of Grisandole*, he asks him whether he is a Christian or not, and when the wild man answers that he is, the Emperor marvels at his "wild aspect".

> Quod the emperour, "Art thow than Cristin?" And he seide, "Ye, withoute faile." "How were thow than baptized," seide the emperour, "whan thow art so wilde?" (PM 231)

The mad knights, on the other hand, are always recognised as humans. Those who meet them seem frightened more by their aggressive behaviour than by their aspect. In the case of Ywain, for example, the hermit initially escapes from the "naked man" because he realises he is armed and out of his mind.

> The ermyte saw and sone was war,
> A naked **man** a bow bare.
> He hoped he was wode that tide;
> Tharfore no lenger durst he bide.
> He sperd his gate and in he ran
> Forfered of that wode **man**. (lines 1673-1678; YG 45)

It is clear that the hermit never doubts that Ywain is human, as he identifies him as a man. Also Sir Dagonet, when telling King Mark of his encounter with Tristan, describes him as a "foole naked" rather than as a monstrous wild being (MDA 371). Lancelot is

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even judged a man "of grete worshyp" by sir Blyaunte's dwarf, despite the fact that both he and his master have just been attacked by the mad knight (MDA 605). Despite the common traits, in medieval imagination the mad knights and the wild man were probably represented differently. This seems confirmed by the extant iconographic representations. In one of the manuscripts of the *Roman de Tristan*,[236] a picture of the encounter between mad Tristan and King Mark can be seen (fig. 16). Two shepherds are indicating the sleeping madman to the king. Tristan has a beard, necessary to justify the fact that his uncle does not recognise him, but which is nothing like the overgrown hair of the wild man, and is shorter than the king's. The mad knight wears no armour, but is not naked; he is wearing a long shirt slightly torn on the hem. His general aspect is therefore sufficiently far from the usual representation of a knight to suggest to the viewer that he is not in his normal state, but at the same time does not resemble the traditional image of the wild man, who is generally dressed in fur or foliage and carries a club.

When he appears in medieval romance, the wild man is often opposed to the knight. This happens for obvious reasons: the *woodwose* represents something primitive, wild and uncontrolled, while the knight someone whose physical strength and skills are devoted to the defence of the community and of superior values. This can be seen for example in the story of *Sir Enyas and the ungrateful lady*. There is no extant text[237] containing this episode, but the tale can be reconstructed from iconographic representations, like those present in the marginalia of the *Smithfield Decretals* (fig. 17-19).[238] A young maid is kidnapped by a *woodwose* and dragged in the forest. Sir Enyas, an old knight, runs to her rescue and kills the wild man. The couple then meets a

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[236] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 335, f. 226v.
[237] Roger Sherman Loomis, "A Phantom Tale of Female Ingratitude", *Modern Philology*, 14, 1917, pp. 750-755, p. 750.
[238] *Smithfield Decretals*, ff. 72r-75v; 101r-106v.

younger knight. He challenges Sir Enyas for the possession of the lady, the old knight refuses and leaves the choice to her. The ungrateful maid chooses the younger man, and he then asks for sir Enyas' dog. Unlike the lady, the dog proves faithful to his master; enraged, the young knight attack sir Enyas, who defeats him. The maid attempts to return to her former protector but he rejects her. In the end, she is devoured by two bears. In the story, the protagonist has two opponents: the younger knight and the *woodwose*. Sir Enyas represents strength tempered by valour, humility and experience which is opposed to the arrogance of the younger knight and the primitive and ungovernable force of the wild man. As for Ywain's Giant Herdsman, the wild man, when confronted with the knight, is an adversary who has to be defeated in order to affirm chivalric values over natural disorder. It is needless to say that the wild man, despite his exceptional strength, never stands a chance against a knight. Lancelot and the other wild knights, on the contrary, are never defeated in the struggles they undertake, even when these are against another knight. This is not surprising: Lancelot is the best knight in the world and the others are among the most skilled knights of their court. However, at the same time this seems to reinforce the idea that they are not to be considered on the same level as the wild man, otherwise the reassuring idea of the civil warrior triumphing over wild violence would be lost.

As the incarnation of wilderness, the wild man is thus perceived as something different from the cultural frame of both audience and author. Consequently, both the monstrous *woodwose* and simply a man or population that is "wild" evoke a similar idea of otherness. In his translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* by Bartholomeus Anglicus, John Trevisa uses the phrase "wild woodemen" to indicate an exotic population which makes use of the seeds of the "scopa tree", probably a kind of birch.

> And bereþ [seed] þat is voyde as it were hulkes or lere coddes, and wilde men of woode and forestes vseþ þat seed in stede of bred. [...] Therefore **wilde woodemen** in deserte vseþ

þe seed þereof and þe ius in stede of corn and [of wyne and] of olyue, as Plius toucheþ þere he treteþ of þe ius of trees.[239]

Although nothing is said about their having a different aspect, these wild men are representative of what is totally different, even in everyday gestures such as sowing or preparing the bread.

The most evident example of wild men as the strange "others" can be found the romances concerning the figure of Alexander the Great. The setting of the medieval adventures of the Macedonian king is by definition exotic and it offers an excellent occasion to insert encounters with strange beasts and populations. In the *Prose Alexander* the Macedonian king fights against some populations of wild creatures which definitely correspond to the description of the *woodwose*, as some of them are covered with fur and others are wild giants who fight with clubs.

> When þay ware passed oute of thir woddeӡ þay come in-till a faire felde vn-till a place whare this forsaid riuere ran. And þare þay fande bath **men & women a naked**. And þay ware als **rughe e of hare as þay hade bene bestes**. Whase kynde & custom it was als wele to be in þe water, als on þe lande. And als sone als þay saw Alexander Oste onane þay fledd to þe water, and dowked in-till it.
>
> […] Abowte þat felde was a thikke wodd of tresse berand fruyte; of þe whilke **wilde men þat duelt in þe Same wodd** usede for till hafe þaire fude, whase **bodyes ware grete as geaunteӡ**, and þaire **cletynge ware made of skynnes of dyuerse besteӡ**. And when þay saw Alexander Oste luge þare, onane þare come oute of þe wodd a grete multitude of þam wit large roddes in þaire handӡ & bi-gan to feghte wit þe oste. And þan Alexander commanded þat all [þe] oste schulde sette vp a schowte at anes. And also sone als þe wylde men herde þat noyse, þay were wondere fered be-cause þay had neuer be-fore herde swilke a noyse. And than þay be-gan to flee hedir & thedir in þe wodd. And Alexander & his men persued þam and slewe of þam vicxxxiiij. And þay slew of Alexander knyghtes xxvij. In þat felde Alexander and his oste leuged iij dayes and vetailed þam of þat fruyte þat growed in þe wodd.[240]

After this battle, Alexander's soldiers manage to capture one of these wild men, a strange creature with the head of a swine. The giant initially looks quiet and stands

[239] M. C. Seymour, Gabriel M. Liegey, and others (eds), *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, vol. II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 1055.

[240] J. S. Westlake (ed.), *The Prose Life of Alexander, from the Thorton Ms*, London: Oxford University Press, 1913, pp. 75-76; 89.

baldly but as the king has a young maiden brought in front of him, he loses control, excited by lust. He is therefore bound to a tree and burnt because of his hopeless wild nature. Like Merlin, this wild man evokes the idea of madness.

> And as it ware abowte none, þare come anon þam a **wilde man**, als mekill as a geaunte. **And he was rughe of hare all ouer, and his hede was lyke till a swyne, And his voyce also**. And when Alexander saw hym, he bad his knyghtis tak hym and bryng hym bi-for hym. And when þay come abowte hym, he was **na thynge fered, ne fledd noȝte, bot stodd baldly bifore þam**. And when Alexander saw that, he comanded þat þay sulde take a ȝonge **damesell & nakken hir** & sett hir bi-fore hym. And þay did soo. And onane, he anne apon hir **romyandd as he hadd bne wodd**. Bot þe knyghtes wit grete dificcultee refte hyr fra hym. And ay he romyed & made grete mane. And efte þay broghte hym till Alexander and sett hym bi-fore hym. And Alexander wonderd gretly of his figure. And þan he gerte bynd hym till a tree & make fyre about hym & brynne hym. And so þay did.[241]

In the Alexander romances, the wild man is charged with a sense of exoticism aimed at underlining his being different, to the point that the protagonist can imprison and kill him without remorse. The Arthurian mad knights present some characteristics which could evoke a sense of exoticism; as mentioned in the previous chapter, Lancelot is "black skinned" (FL 45), like a moor, and Ywain drinks animal blood (YG 45; lines 1669-1670), like the Saracens;[242] nearly all of them are regarded as something strange and fascinating by other people. However, they are never regarded as different or not belonging to the human race, as happens to the wild man. They do not inspire antagonism in those who meet them, nor the idea that they need to be killed lest they constitute a danger for the community, even though they are kept under control. After the initial fear, the feelings they inspire are on the contrary "charité" (YG 45; line 1679) or pity (PB 288; line 7317). Despite their being outside the civilised world because of their insanity, they have not become "other" as is the wild man.

The uncivilised wild man is sometimes connected with the idea of innocence and represented as *naïf.* This concept, generally associated with later colonialism and with the figure of the "noble savage", was not totally alien to medieval culture. Percival, for

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[241] *Prose Life of Alexander*, pp. 89-90.
[242] See Chapter 2.

example, is the perfect example of uncivilised wild man whose ignorance of the conventions of the world is the cause of both comic situations and of his uncorrupted character. When he first arrives at king Arthur's court, for example, he places his horse so close to the king that it "kisses" the king's forehead while he is eating (lines 493-496).[243] Later on, his lack of knowledge of the court world induces him to defy and kill the red knight whom everybody fears (line 657-710).[244] In the case of the wild knight, his ignorance of the social rules does not seem to be perceived as comic, even though it generates comic situations, because it cannot be otherwise until the man has recovered his sanity. For the same reason, unlike what happens in the case of Percival, no one regards the knight's wilderness as something which can be amended with education. The untaught wild man and the mad knight were probably seen as different figures.

The differences between wild knight and the wild man - be it the *woodwose* or simply the uncivilised man – therefore suggest that these two themes might have developed separately. The characteristics they have in common might be justified otherwise than a simple direct influence, even though it might be conceded that they are both connected with the macro-archetype of the wild man. It is very likely that the great popularity of the two themes and their similarities created some crossovers. This was almost inevitable. The insanity of the madman is a dysfunction of the mind, and the wilderness of the wild man a lack in moral and social conscience; both these deficiencies are not visible, as can be a wound or a physical defect. Romance writers seldom use introspection to describe situations and seem to prefer images. Representing something completely abstract like madness required the use of conventional images from Biblical antecedents, medical beliefs, everyday customs, superstition or folklore. When these conventional images coincided with those of another figure, the possibility

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[243] Mary Flowers Braswell, *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995, p. 20.

[244] *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain*, pp. 25-27.

of borrowing other traits to give more immediate and synthetic representation, as happens for instance in the case of Owein or of Partonope, certainly was tempting. This however need not imply a derivation of the mad knight from the wild man; it seems more likely that these crossovers should be regarded as an additional contribution to the complexity of these episodes of madness.

6.5 A Classical Madman: Ajax Telamonius

The possible archetypes so far studied, explore the wild madness in terms of modality of representation. Even assuming an influence of Nebuchadnezzar, or of another archetype, on the wild knight, an important aspect remains unexplained. These episodes do not only share a similar representation of madness, but they also present a common narrative structure. The protagonist, a figure of excellence with superior skills and an important role in the community, undergoes an emotional checkmate, and consequently reacts with madness. Moreover, in most episodes, the other members of his community mourn for the social void his madness has created. Unlike what happens in the story of Nebuchadnezzar or in other *exempla*, the keystone of the episode does not seem to be madness as a direct punishment for the protagonist's sins, but the awareness on the part of both audience and characters that the madman is not a simple lunatic from a village, but the best champion of the king, or anyway someone with an important role in society. When looking at these episodes from this point of view, they bear an extraordinary resemblance to the classic myth of Ajax Telamonius, a character from the Troy tradition. In the fifteenth book of the *Iliad,* he is the principal warrior to defend the Greek ships from the Trojan attack[245] and when Ulysses meets him in the other-world, in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, he describes him as the best and bravest warrior after

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[245] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A. T, Murray, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 128-162.

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Achilles.[246] When the latter dies, both Ajax and Ulysses claim his armour; Ajax demands it as a tribute for his valour, but Ulysses argues that the armour should go to himself, since he has contributed more than anyone else to the fall of Troy. The Greek decide that the arms should go to Ulysses despite the fact that his rival's military skills are undoubtedly superior. Ajax is overcome with anger and shame and thus loses his mind. Afterwards, he recovers his sanity and when he realises how he has behaved, he kills himself with his own sword, thus causing great sorrow in the Greek camp. The story of Ajax therefore presents the same narrative structure as the madness of the wild knight. Before madness, both Ajax and the wild knight are important figures in the society to which they belong. Like the mad knight, Ajax finds himself in a situation where nothing honourable can be done. Accepting Ulysses's triumph, he would deny his own superiority, and his honour and public image would inevitably suffer from it. At the same time, challenging the unanimous decision of the judges would be equally dishonourable. Madness is therefore presented as the only possible reaction for the hero. Actually, in some cases, such as Sophocles's tragedy *Ajax*,[247] his madness is explicitly induced by a divine intervention: Athena, aware that Ajax is planning to kill Ulysses, sends a spell of madness on the warrior. Even though in this version insanity is not spontaneous, it is presented as the only possible way-out from an unpleasant situation. This, as mentioned in Chapter 4, happens also to the wild knights, who lose their sanity to escape a no-way-out situation. As in the case of the mad knights, Ajax's disappearance creates a void in society and in all these cases, madness seems to be considered even more tragic because it concerns the best fighter of the community.

In some texts, the similarities between Ajax and the wild knight are not limited

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[246] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T, Murray, Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 438-440.

[247] David R. Slavitt, Palmer Bovie (eds.) *Sophocles I: Ajax, Women of Thrachis, Electa, Philoctetes*, trans. Frederick Raphael, Kenneth McLeish, Philadelphia: University of Pensylvania Press, 1998, p. 11.

to the narrative structure, but are extended to the representation of madness. In the fourth century poem *Posthomerica* by Quintus of Smyrna,[248] he is even said to wander through wild places and to behave like an animal. Moreover, as happens to Lancelot in the scene with sir Blyaunte, Ajax displays an extremely aggressive nature and suffers from hallucinations: he finds a flock of sheep and slaughters all the animals believing he is killing Ulysses and the other Greeks and avenging his honour. Interesting as these last aspects might be, it is necessary to remember that these similarities might be due to a simple cultural convergence and not to a direct or indirect derivation or influence. Even though the Troy cycle was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, it is very unlikely that medieval readers knew it from Greek sources. The figure of Ajax, however, occurs quite frequently in Latin texts which probably were still read in the Middle Ages. Virgil, for example, mentions him, even though briefly, in his *Aeneid.*

> tum Danai gemitu atque ereptae virginis ira
> undique collecti invadunt, acerrimus **Aiax**
> et gemini Atridae Dolopumque exercitus omnis:
> adversi rupto ceu quondam turbine venti
> confligunt, Zephyrusque Notusque et laetus Eois
> Eurus equis; stridunt silvae saevitque tridenti
> spumeus atque imo Nereus ciet aequora fundo. (book II, lines 413-419)[249]

> Then the Danaans, with a shout of rage at the maiden's rescue, mustering from all sides, fall upon us, Ajax most fiercely, the two sons of Atreus, and the whole Dolopian host: even at times, when a hurricane bursts forth, diverse winds clash, West and South and East, proud of his orient steeds, the forests groan and Nereus, steeped in foam, storms with his trident, and stirs the seas from their lowest depths.[250]

In one of his satires, Horace inserts a brief scene where Agamennon and another Greek soldier discuss whether Ajax should be honourably buried or not. While the latter argues that he deserves it as he was a valorous warrior, Agamennon replies that in his madness he had tried to murder all the Greek kings responsible for depriving him of the arms.

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[248] Alan James (ed.), *Quintus of Smyrna, The Trojan Epic Posthomerica*, trans. Alan James, Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2004, pp. 89-92.

[249] Jeffrey Henderson, G. P. Gold (eds.), *Virgil,* vol. I, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Harvard, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 344.

[250] *Virgil,* vol. I, p. 345.

"Cur **Aiax**, heros ab Achille secundus,
putescit, totiens servatis clarus Achivis,
gaudeat ut populus Priami Priamusque inhumato,
per quem tot iuvenes patrio caruere sepulcro?"
"Mille ovium insanus morti dedit, inclitum Ulixen
et Menelaum una mecum se occidere clamans."
 [...] "Insanus quid enim **Aiax**
fecit? Cum stravit ferro pecus, abstinuit vim
uxore et gnato; mala multa precatus Atridis
non ille aut Teucrum aut ipsum violavit Ulixen." (book II, Satire 3, lines 193-198; 201
204)[251]

"Why does Ajax, a hero second only to Achilles, lie rotting though so often he won glory
by saving the Greeks? Is it that Priam and Priam's people may exult in that man's lacking
burial, through whom so many of their sons were bereft of burial in their native land?"
"The madman slew a thousand sheep, crying that he was slaying famed Ulysses, Menelaus,
and myself." [...] "Why, what did the madman Ajax do, when he slew the flock with the
sword? He withheld violence from wife and child. His curses on the Atridae were copious,
but no harm did he do either to Teucer or even to Ulysses."[252]

Horace therefore associates Ajax with his wild madness, but also with his valour and

with the community theme. After Agamennon is reminded of Ajax's important role

among the Greeks, the two characters debate on what should be considered a

dishonourable madness. Horace's conclusion seems to be that madness does not affect

one's honour unless it actually damages other members of society, but this short passage

actually brings forward another interesting issue. Agamennon's justification for leaving

Ajax unburied implies that since the hero has behaved dishonourably in his madness, he

has lost all the honour derived from his previous heroic actions, a point of view which

his interlocutor clearly does not share. The same doubt might be applied to the

Arthurian mad knight. In the case of Lancelot (MDA 610) and Ywain (YG 48; lines

1792-1796), the protagonist himself seems to question what is left of his honour after

the period of madness. Medieval readers probably had little doubt about it, just like the

other characters who witness the knight's madness, since a figure connected with many

exceptional triumphs can easily be excused for a moment of human weakness. On the

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[251] T. E. Page et al. (eds.), *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough,
Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1961, pp. 168-70.
[252] *Horace: Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, pp. 169-171.

contrary, the fact that Lancelot and the others can afford a period of wild madness without losing their honour reminds the readers of the superiority of these knights. Madness, both for Horace's Ajax and for the wild knight, somehow becomes a means of exalting the protagonist's previous honourable deeds.

Another, even though very synthetic, account of Ajax's death can be found in Caius Iulius Hyginus's *Fabulae* (I century).

> Achille occiso ac sepulturae tradito, Aiax Telamonius, quod frater patruelis eius fuit, postulavit a Danais, ut arma sibi Achillis darent: quae ira Minervae, ei abiurgata sunt ab Agamemnone et Menelao, et Ulixi data. **Aiax, furia accepta**, per insaniam pecora sua et se ipsum vulneratum occidit eo gladio, quem ab
> Hectore muneri accepit, dum cum eo in acie contendit.[253]

> When Achilles was killed and given burial Telamonian Ajax demanded from the Danaans the arms of Achilles, on the grounds that he was cousin on his father's side. Through the anger of Minerva they were denied him by Agamennon and Menelaus, and given to Ulysses. Ajax, harbouring rage, in madness slaughtered his flocks, and killed himself with that sword he had received from Hector as a gift when the two met in battle line.[254]

The author here inserts a further explanation about the protagonist's madness stating that he lost his mind after being sized by *furia*, a furious anger. Rage as the major cause for Ajax's madness is also present in the second book of Seneca's treatise *De Ira*. The poet affirms that excessive anger is a form of madness, since it leads to dramatic and unreasonable attitudes. He then takes Ajax as one of the most evident examples of how anger can lead to insanity.

> Multi itaque continuaverunt irae furorem nec quam expulerant mentem umquam receperunt: **Aiacem in mortem egit furor, in furorem ira**.[255]

> Many, therefore, have continued in the frenzy of anger, and have never recovered the reason that had been unseated. It was frenzy that drove Ajax to his death and anger drove him to frenzy.[256]

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[253] Antònia Soler I Nicolau (ed.), *Higì, Faules*, vol. II, Barcelona: Fundaciò Bernat Metge, 2011, p. 33.

[254] Mary Grant (ed.), *The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. Mary Grant, Lawrence University of Kansas Press, 1960, p. 93.

[255] T. E. Page et al. (eds.), *Seneca, Moral Essays*, vol. I, London: William Heinemann, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 250.

[256] *Seneca, Moral Essays*, vol. I, p. 251.

Ajax is often mentioned also in medieval texts; unlike classic authors, however, medieval writers seem to be intrigued more by his military skill than by his madness. In the twelfth century, Benoît de Saint Maure writes probably the most popular medieval adaptation of the Troy cycle, the *Roman de Troie*. The contest for Achilles' armour is here transformed in a debate on who should have the Palladium. The Greek decide that it should go to Ulysses and Ajax nearly loses his mind with anger and threatens to kill the other Greeks.

> Telamon en est toz **enragiez**:
> Angoissos est et si **iriez**
> Que **por un poi le sen ne pert**.
> En audiènce e en apert
> Les manace, senz porloignier,
> A toz les testes a trenchier:
> Le sanc del cors lor espandra;
> Ja autrement ne remandra. (lines 27081-27088)[257]

> Telamon is enraged for this; he is so ailed and angered that he nearly loses his mind. He threatens them openly and in private to cut their heads off without delay; he shall spill their blood from their bodies, he will not defer that. (translation mine)

Ajax does not go really insane: his reaction here seems more an uncontrollable fury than madness. Benoît might have combined the two main traits of this figure, military skill and insanity, in order to attribute to Ajax another madness, often associated with militant epic figures: battle frenzy.

Even though battle frenzy is not explicitly mentioned, in historical and philosophic works Ajax is mentioned for his boldness in battle. It has been suggested[258] that Alan de Lille's reference to Ajax in his *Anticlaudianus* might contain an allusion to Richard Lionheart.

> Militis excedit legem plus milite miles
> **Ajax** milicieque modus decurrit in iram (lines 177-178)[259]

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[257] Léopold Constans (ed.), *Le Roman de Troie par Benoit de Sainte-Maure, Publié d'après tous les Manuscripts Connus*, vol. IV, Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1908, p. 216.

[258] Charles Hutchings, "L'Anticlaudianus d'Alan de Lille. Étude de Chronologie", *Romania*, 50, 1924, pp. 1-13, pp. 10-11.

[259] Thomas Wright, *The Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets and Epigrammists of the Twelfth Century*, vol. 2,

> Ajax, outstanding soldiery, goes beyond the requirements for soldiers and the soldier's stability degenerates into madness[260]

Similarly, in his *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, the fifteenth-century historian John Major compares the leading skills of William Wallace to those of Ajax.

> Acies ad pugnam, more Hannibalis aut Ulyssis ordinare; & cum hoc in plano campo, in morem **Ajacis Telamonii**, certare didicit[261]
>
> He would dispose the army for battle as cunningly as Hannibal or Ulysses; and when this was in open field, he could fight like Ajax Telamonius (translation mine)

Hypothesising a derivation of the narrative structure of the wild-knight episodes of madness from the myth of Ajax would undoubtedly present some problematic aspects. Many texts containing the description of Ajax's madness which are now lost might have been still read in late antiquity and in the early Middle Ages; Livius Andronicus, for instance, wrote a tragedy, *Aiax Mastigophorus*, about Ajax's insanity and suicide; unfortunately today only few fragments of the play are extant. However, most medieval sources about the story of Ajax seem to focus more on his military valour, or on the disastrous outcomes of excessive anger, than on his madness. Besides, this narrative structure is common to most episodes of wild madness, even to those which are least likely to have been influenced by classical culture, as is the case of the eleventh century Irish poem *Serglige Con Culainn*.

Despite the fact that the figure of Ajax certainly was still known throughout the Middle Ages, so far, there does not seem to be enough evidence to affirm with reasonable certainty that the popularity of the narrative scheme of the myth led to the creation of these episodes of madness in Arthurian literature. Nevertheless, the legend of

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Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 279.

[260] Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus or The Good and Perfect Man*, trans. James J. Sheridan, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973, p. 52.

[261] John Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae, tam Angliae quam Scotiae*, Edimburgh: Robert Fribarn, 1740, p. 162.

the Greek warrior proves extremely useful to underline some aspects of these episodes of wild madness which are absent in the other archetypes. Most interesting is the example of the Ovidian version of the myth. The Roman poet described the death of Ajax in the thirteenth book of his *Metamorphoses*. After the arms of Achilles are assigned to Ulysses, the hero is overwhelmed by anger and commits suicide. From his blood, the hyacinth is created.

> Hectora qui solus, qui ferrum ignesque Iovemque
> sustinuit totiens, unam non sustinet iram,
> invictumque virum vicit dolor: arripit ensem
> et "meus hic certe est! an et hunc sibi poscit Ulixes?
> hoc" ait "utendum est in me mihi, quique cruore
> saepe Phrygum maduit, domini nunc caede madebit,
> ne quisquam Aiacem possit superare nisi Aiax."
> dixit et in pectus tum demum vulnera passum,
> qua patuit ferrum, letalem condidit ensem.
> nec valuere manus infixum educere telum:
> expulit ipse cruor, rubefactaque sanguine tellus
> purpureum viridi genuit de caespite florem,
> qui prius Oebalio fuerat de vulnere natus;
> littera communis mediis pueroque viroque
> inscripta est foliis, haec nominis, illa querellae. (book XIII, lines 384-398)[262]

> He who had so often all alone withstood great Hector, so often sword and fire and Jove, could not withstand passion only; and resentment conquered the unconquered hero. Then, snatching out his sword, he cried: "But this at least is mine; or does Ulysses claim this also to myself; and the sword which has often reeked with Phrygian blood will now reek with his master's, lest any man save Ajax ever conquer Ajax." He spoke and deep in his breast, which had not until then suffered any wound, where the way was open for the blow, he plunged his fatal sword. No hand was strong enough to draw away the deep-driven steel; the blood itself drove it out. The ensanguined ground produced from the green sod a purple flower, which in old time had sprung from Hyacintus' blood. The petals are inscribed with letters, serving alike for hero and for boy: this one a name, and that a cry of woe.[263]

Like other Latin poets, Ovid attributes Ajax's suicide to anger and not to madness. Even though, as mentioned above, in Latin culture anger was considered a sort of madness, Ajax's actions are not described by Ovid as excessive; the hero here reacts in the only possible honourable way for a Roman who cannot avenge his honour: suicide. Classical culture did not condemn suicide as sinful; one of the most famous examples of Roman

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[262] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. II, trans. Frank Justus Miller, London: William Heinemann, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958; p. 256.
[263] *Metamorphoses*, vol. II, p. 255-257.

virtue was that of Lucretia, who had killed herself because she could not bear the dishonour of rape.

In the Old French version of the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ovide Moralisé*, however, the story of Ajax is approached differently. In a Christian text, suicide cannot be indicated as a solution to dishonour, hence, the theme of Ajax's madness reappears. The protagonist is so abashed by the fact that the arms have been assigned to the best speaker and not to the best warrior that he is seized by madness and kills himself.

> Ajax, cil qui par sa poissance
> Gari seul d'ardoir le navage
> Par sa force et par son barnage,
> **A perdu par son mal plaidier,**
> Com cil qui ne s'en sot aidier,
> Les armes, dont il ot tele ire
> Que nulz homs ne le porroit dire,
> **De duel le convint forsener.**
> **Ne pot son corrouz refrener**
> **Ne il ne pot n'il ne savoit.**
> **En ce maltalent qu'il avoit**
> Traist l'espee qu'il avoit çainte,
> Quin mainte fois ot esté tainte
> Ou sanc aus chevaliers de Troie.
> "Certes, dist il, ceste est or moie!
> Die Ulixes qu'en la li baille!
> J'essaierai ja s'ele taille!
> Por ce que des or en avant
> Ne die nulz ne ne se vant
> **Que par aucun soie conquis,**
> **Ocirrai moi**." (book XIII, lines 1260-1280)[264]

> Ajax, who alone had defended the ships from fire with his valour, his strength and his troops, lost his weapons because of his poor pleading, like one who cannot turn things to his advantage. He therefore was seized by such an anger that no man could describe and he could not help going out of his mind with sorrow. He was unable to restrain his grief: he could not and knew not how. As he was in this sad state, he unsheathed the sword which hung on his side and which so many times was dipped in the blood of the knights of Troy. He said, "Truly, this is mine! Let Ulysses ask me to hand it over to him! I will try it to see if it cuts! I will kill myself lest from now on he might say anything or boast that I was defeated by someone." (translation mine)

The author of the *Ovide Moralisé* might have known some texts where the wild madness of Ajax is described; however, this is not absolutely necessary to justify the presence of the theme of madness. As mentioned above, medieval Christian morality

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[264] C. De Boer (ed.), *Ovide Moralisé, Poème du Commencement du Quatorzième Siècle, Publié d'après Tous les Manuscrits Connus*, vol. IV, Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1936, pp. 396-397.

condemned suicides as murderers; the poet here was probably not interested in portraying Ajax as a sinner, especially considering that in the moral of the story he compares him to the apostles, the martyrs and to St. John the Baptist (lines 1307-1337),[265] and, since the Ovidian myth concluded with the protagonist's suicide, madness could be a possible means to justify it. In the previous section, we have seen how madness could be used to rehabilitate both murders and suicides in real life. However, the Ovidian story explores some aspects of the death of Ajax which might be found also in the knight's wild madness.

First of all, both the story of Ajax and that of the mad knight are based on a paradox. The protagonist is somehow defeated despite his being one of the best warriors of his community. The event is made even more astonishing by the fact that the situation is not generated by an adversary with superior strength or skills but by something outside the usual category of "enemies". In the case of Ajax, despite all his military valour, the protagonist loses the "struggle" with Ulysses because of his *mal plaidier*, his inability to plead convincingly; the mad knight is generally undone by his own feelings. This leads to the second point in common between Ajax and the wild knight. As the Ajax of the Old French poem affirms, echoing Ovid, he will be conquered only by himself. Despite its tragic aspects, the madness of the Arthurian knight, and consequently the protagonist's long absence from court allows interesting developments in terms of narrative, as analysed in the previous chapters. The only way of doing this without deflating the protagonist's superiority in fighting is by having him defeated by his own self, that is to say by madness. When they recover their sanity, these mad knights are all weakened, ashamed and deprived of their armour, just as if they had lost a duel. Finally, in both cases, madness is connected to suicide and is implicitly indicated as a way-out from an unbearable situation. Tristan goes completely mad when he cannot

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[265] *Ovide Moralisé*, vol. IV, pp. 397-398.

find his sword to kill himself (CRT 173), Lancelot launches himself out of the window (MDA 594) and before losing his mind Ywain declares that his sorrow will kill him (Y 45; line 1648).

These episodes of wild madness have many analogues; some of them are very far in both space and time. The Arthurian wild madness is paralleled both in terms of representation of insanity, as happens in the case of Nebuchadnezzar of the *berserkir*, and, to some extent, of narrative structure. Interpreting the madness of the Arthurian knight as a derivation from one of these analogues would be reductive, because, as analysed in the previous chapters, the characteristics of these episodes probably are determined by many factors and influences, such as superstition, medical theories, and other legal conventions. Although these parallels cannot be assumed as exclusive archetypes without raising some perplexities, influences from one or more of them are possible; in addition, they might be helpful in shedding some light on some aspects of the wild knight, and are hence worth taking into account in the analysis of these episodes of madness. As announced at the beginning of this chapter, the concept of archetype must be handled carefully, especially when dealing with figures like that of the wild knight, which seem subject to many cultural and contextual influences; even so, all the archetypes analysed in this chapter could be included, as mentioned above, in the "macro-archetype" of the wild man. This is not surprising: archetypal motifs are to the psyche what instincts are to the body.[266] Instinctively, whatever does not conform to the rules and standards of the community does not belong to it, and must be placed, both physically and morally, outside it, that is to say in the wilderness.

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[266] Charlotte Spivack, Christine Herold (eds), *Archetypal Readings of Medieval Literature*, Lewinston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, p. 1.

Conclusion

From the episodes here analysed, it appears evident that the wild madness of the knight probably constituted a category of its own. It is also clear that by the time the Middle English adaptations were made, this wild madness had not only been subject to a complex stratification of influences but had also become canonised. The description of the wild knight contains standard elements aimed at offering the audience the exact coordinates of the protagonist's status as a madman. Above all, the purpose of these details seems to delineate the knight's new position within the social structure. These knights renounce their social function when they give up their armour, and their aristocratic status when they live on roots and berries, like wild animals. Besides, madness deprives them not only of their high position in the social scale, but also of their actual place in society, as they feel compelled to dwell outside the civilised world, in wild places where social rules and conventions can be ignored. The importance of the role of the community in these episodes is evident also in the digressions about the other characters of the romance, who miss an important element of their community, and who consequently try to bring the protagonist back to his previous state, either looking for him or healing him. For the protagonists, madness certainly represents a central event in their life and development as characters, but they do not behave as if they underwent a process of self-discovery, nor do they act in order to return to their previous condition. On the contrary, they engage in a series of adventures, probably perceived as comic, which are not connected by a particularly structured narrative plan, and could potentially be reiterated infinite times. In the end, the adventures of the madman are interrupted by the other members of the community, who, unlike the madman, follow a circular fairy-tale-like narrative pattern, where the principal aim is re-establishing the

initial situation.

In romance, this madness thus becomes an instrument to allow adventurous developments and to introduce interesting reflections. It triggers a quest, where some characters have the occasion of distinguishing themselves, as happens to Percival in Malory, and others, like Kahedin and Palamedes, form an alliance. In the complex pattern of social balances and in the alternating phases of the *rota fortunae*, even a tragic event such as madness can bring along some positive outcomes for somebody else. The protagonist does not become a negative figure because of his madness – none of the other characters perceives him as such – but he is degraded from his heroic status to a grotesque and sometimes comic one. The best warrior of the community is transformed into a sort of wild animal and his status of madman allows him to confront improbable and comic enemies, such as a dwarf page or the court fool. Although these struggles between the mad knight and a comic character were probably perceived as amusing by the medieval audience, in normal circumstances beating a dwarf or a fool would be felt as inappropriate and dishonourable for a knight with superior skills like Lancelot or Tristan. Madness averts this moral conflict and makes the comic scene possible.

The mad protagonist also offers the opportunity to reflect on some important aspects of the chivalric world and to provide the audience with some didactic messages. Although the madman is not responsible for his actions, according both to the laws of the time and to the other characters of the episode, the protagonist often feels that his behaviour during his madness has dishonoured him. From the moment he is healed, he undertakes many adventures also in order to regain his lost honour, as happens to Lancelot, Ywain, and Partonope. Moreover, after they experience insanity, these characters experience the self-made-man road to glory and honour which can be found

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in the popular romance theme of the *bel inconnu*, but which would be otherwise impossible for figures like Lancelot or Tristan, renowned for their noble origins. Madness therefore represents also a way of enhancing the protagonist's personal skills.

None of the other members of the community, however, seems to share the idea that the knight has been dishonoured during his madness. On the contrary, their attitude towards the madman is generally extremely protective. These episodes seem thus to have not only an entertaining function, but also a didactic one. Since, unlike what happens in other episodes, here no explicit moral message is given, the didactic function is fulfilled by presenting the audience with a model of behaviour. According to the model of behaviour here provided, the madman must be looked after and not excluded; he is subject to a different set of rules, and can sometimes be healed simply by being well dressed and fed. Surprisingly, madness here acts as a pretext to instruct the audience on how to act when dealing with a lunatic rather than introducing a reflection on insanity as a result of one's sins.

The traditional conception of the madman as someone who should be separated from the other members of the community is naturally not completely absent, but is present more in the wild knight's attitude than in the other characters'. This dichotomy was probably motivated by different factors. In terms of narrative, it allowed more interesting developments; although entertainment and didactic function might here coexist, the first seems definitely the main aim of these episodes and the second is, to some extent, subordinated to it. The second reason is that in a period when communities experienced first a decisive expansion and then a decimation of their members because of the plague and of wars, it was certainly preferable, in terms of social balance, to encourage the audience to learn how to keep lunatics under control than to send them away. Finally, since in this period the Anglo-French area was governed by sovereigns

with mental disturbances, the negative vision of the madman as a sinner probably needed to be revised.

These wild knights raise also some reflections on how romance handles archetypes, both in terms of representation of madness and of narrative structure. Archetypal figures such as the hermit, Nebuchadnezzar or the *woodwose,* cross and probably influence the representation of the mad knight. Any potential echo of these archetypes, however, seems to be aimed more at creating a more synthetic and efficient portrait of the wild knight by recalling figures probably well known to the audience, than at realising the unconscious expression of ancestral themes. This second interpretation, much more in line with the Jungean archetypal theories, might be more appropriate to justify the narrative structure of these episodes. The plot follows a narrative structure common also to other myths, such as the one of Ajax. Although the legend of Ajax probably never acted as a direct influence on these mad knights, it presents interesting archetypal *topoi,* such as madness as the only way out of a no-win situation, and the question of the hero's honour and of the responsibility of the community, *topoi* which can be found also in these episodes.

Through these episodes of madness it is naturally possible also to have a more complete vision of what madness meant in the Middle Ages. As explained in the preface, the basic criteria used in this dissertation for labelling a character as insane has been his lacking sense, memory, intelligence and being unable to manage himself and his properties. After analysing these episodes, it appears evident that in the Middle Ages insanity is also a question of defining space, both physically and mentally, as well as one's position in it. When they become such, lunatics not only tend to place themselves outside the civilised world, but they also "out of their mind" and "out of their sense and reason". On the other hand, the idea of healing often coincides with the image of

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extirpating madness from the protagonist, an equivalence which probably derives from the vision of madness as a demonic possession. Insanity is therefore an invasion of the self which destroys its limits and separates individuals from their context. This lack of delimitation of the self is, once again, represented by the protagonist's sudden renunciation to what determines his place in the community, but also by amnesia. Memory seems here to be the main element which allows the definition of the self, and seems to be even more important than establishing one's identity within the community. During their madness, all these knights suffer from amnesia, and they are not healed until they recover their memory, even though they are dressed according to their status and have been recognised by their family or friends. Interestingly, when this disappearance of a defined self takes place, the other members of the society step in not only trying to look after the madman, but also somehow sharing the fault for his present state.

The wild madman is thus a complex figure, which assembles many influences from different aspects of reality, but can be definitely be recognised as constituting a category of his own in a world where madness can assume many different aspects. The wild madman is but one of the different fools of this crazy world; this is particularly evident in the closing lines of Lancelot's story. When he goes back to Camelot, the knight is welcomed back by the queen and the king.

> Than the quene made him hym grete chere. "A, Jesu!" seyde kymge Arthure, "I mervayle for what cause ye, sir Lancelot, wente oute of youre mynde. For I and many othir deme hyt was for the love of fayre Elayne, the doughtir of kynge Pelles, by whom ye ar noysed that ye have gotyn a chylde, and hys name ys Galahad. And men sey that he shall do many mervaylouse thyngys." "My lorde," seyde sir Lancelot, "yf I ded ony foly I have that I sought". (MDA 617)

Here Lancelot's wild madness is completely misunderstood by Arthur, who, although aware of some true elements of the story, does not realise their real meaning. Is this not a sort of madness, possibly even worse than Lancelot's? Is the knight's observation that

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he reaped what he had sown just a way of obtaining the queen's forgiveness by admitting his own guilt or is he insinuating that the king is bound to suffer because of his own folly? These questions might be an interesting starting point for a new journey, just as the end of the knight's wild madness coincides with the beginning of a new adventure.

Appendix
1
Medieval Literary Wild Madmen

Works

Work (in chronological order)	Period	Language	Madman
Vita Merlini	ab.1150	Latin	Merlin
Serglige Con Culainn in *Lebor na hUidre*	12th century	Middle Irish	Cuchulain
Yvain ou le chevalier au Lion	ab. 1177	Old French	Yvain
Amadas et Ydoine	between 1190-1220	Old French	Amadas
Prose Lancelot (*Vulgate-Cycle*)	first half 13th century	Old French	Lancelot
Prose Tristan	1230-1235	Old French	Tristan; Matto Le Breune; Lancelot
Guiron le Courtois	before 1240	Old French	Dagonet
Suite -Merlin	Post-Vulgate 1230-1240	Old French	Lancelot?
Partonopeus de Blois	13th century	Old French	Partonope
Ywain and Gawain	early 14th century	Middle English	Ywain
Decameron	1349 - 1351	Italian	Beritola
Tristano Panciatichiano	14th century	Italian	Tristan
Partonope of Blois	first half 15th century	Middle English	Partonope
Ysaÿe le Triste	15th century	Old French (Picard dialect)	Ysaÿe
Le Dit du Prunier	fifteenth century	Old French	Jehan
Le Morte Darthur	1469	Middle English	Tristan, Matto le Breune, Lancelot

Characters

Charater (in alphabetical order)	Works	Reason	Cure	Notes
Amadas	*Amadas et Ydoine* (between 1190-1220)	**Jealousy/Sorrow** (he finds out the lady is to be married to another)	The lady pronounces his **name**	
Beritola	Decameron (1349 - 1351)	**Mourning** (for husband/sons)	**Return to civilisation**	
Cuchulain	*Serglige Con Culainn* in *Lebor na hUidre* (12th century)	**Loss of lover**; **shame** (for betraying wife)	**Hands/feet bound; magic songs; potion of forgetfulness**	
Dagonet	*Guiron le Courtois* (before 1240)	**Loss** of the lady/**dishonour**	Not healed	The episode is set before the adventures contained in the *Prose Lancelot* and is probably aimed at justifying Dagonet's subsequent role as court fool.
Jehan	*Le Dit du Prunier* (fifteenth century)	**Refusal** on the part of the lady/ **frustration** (he knows not what can be done)	**Bath/shaving/clot hes**	It is not clear whether he is really mad; he is initially wild and unrefined; this could be a return to his initial state.
Lancelot	*Prose Lancelot* (*Vulgate-Cycle*; first half 13th century)	**Forsaking** (on the part of Guinevere; he sleeps with Elaine)	**Holy Grail** (king Pelles and Elaine)	Cure~exorci sm

Lancelot1	*Prose Tristan* (1230-1235)	"	"	"
Lancelot2	*Suite -Merlin* (Post-Vulgate 1230-1240)	"	"	No extant text (reconstructed by Fanny Bogdanow)
Lancelot 3	*Le Morte Darthur* (1469)	"	"	No reference to exorcism
Matto Le Breune	*Le Morte Darthur* (1469)	**Defeat and consequent loss of the lady**	------	Probably same characteristics as Tristan.
Merlin	*Vita Merlini* (ab.1150)	**Mourning** (his brothers die in battle)	**Magic spring**	No love relationship.
Partonopaeus	*Partonopeus de Blois* (13th century)	**Forsaking** (on the part of the lover; he transgresses her rule)	**Hope/food /clothes** (Melior's sister)/**(magic potion)**	No real madness, (but fictional insanity later)
Partonope	*Partonopeus de Blois* (13th century) *Partonope of Blois* (first half 15th century)	"	"	"
Tristan	*Prose Tristan* (1230-1235)	**Jealousy/sense of guilt**	**Food/warm clothes** (King Mark)	Looked after only when they find out his identity
Tristan 1	*Tristano Panciatichiano* (14th century)	"	"	"
Tristan 2	*Le Morte Darthur* (1469)	"	"	"
Ysaÿe	*Ysaÿe le Triste* (15th century)	**Loss** (of the dwarf)	**Magic ring/oil** (dwarf)	Irony?
Yvain	*Yvain ou le chevalier au Lion* (ab. 1177)	**Forsaking** (on the part of his wife; he forgets to keep his	**Magic oil** (women)	

		promise)		
Ywain	Ywain and Gawain (early 14th century)	**Forsaking** (on the part of his wife; he forgets to keep his promise)	**Magic oil** (women)	

Appendix
2
Images

1.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms Fr. 13091, f.106r, known as Psautier de Jean de Berry; late 14th century.

2.

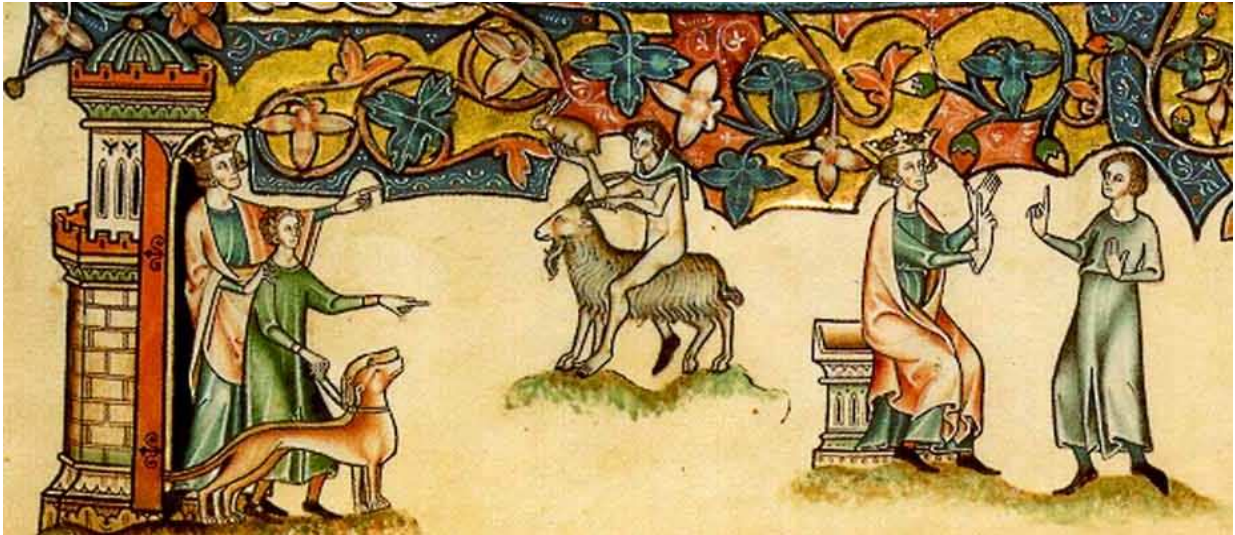Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Ms 1-2005, f.77r, known as Macclesfield Psalter;14th century.

3.

London, British Library, Yates Thompson Ms 14, f. 57v, known as St Omer Psalter, 14th century.

uidebunt iusti 7 timebunt 7 super eum
ridebunt 7 dicent: ecce homo qui non
posuit deum adiutorem suum.
et sperauit in multitudine diuitiarum
suarum:7 preualuit in uanitate sua.
go autem sicut oliua fructifera i domo
dei speraui in misericordia dei in eter
num 7 in seculum seculi.
onfitebor tibi in seculum quia fecisti:7
erpectabo nomen tuum qm bonum e
in conspectu sanctorum tuorum.
ocius mundane uanitatis destru
tor omps deus fac nos qs i domo
tua sicut oliuam flo
rere fructiferam: ut in
misedia tua sperates ab
iniqtan maledicto saluem
xit insipiens in corde

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4.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 366, f. 71v, known as Ormesby Psalter; 14th century.

5.

Ormesby Psalter, f. 71v, detail.

6.

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms Clm 935, f. 25v, known as Prayer book of Saint Hildegard; 12th century.

7.

8.

9.

London, British Library, Royal Ms 10 E IV, ff 115v-116v, known as the Smithfield Decretals; end of 13th - beginning of 14th century.

10.

11.

Smithfield Decretals, ff. 117r-117v.

12.

13.

Smithfield Decretals, ff. 118r-118v.

14.

London, British Library, Harley Ms 4380, f. 1r; between 1470 and 1472 .

15.

Smithfield Decretals, f. 247r.

16.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 335, f. 226v; 15th century.

17.

Smithfield Decretals, f. 72r

18.

Smithfield Decretals, f. 74v.

19.

Smithfield Decretals, f. 101r.

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