



One Of Us W(a/o)nders – Creative Writing PhD Thesis

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Abstract

One Of Us W(a/o)nders is an exploration of Madness and poetry through the lenses of the writer's lived experience of Madness itself. The thesis consists of a sequence of poems which aim to express the writer's own experiences of Madness and Psychiatrization both at the level of the unfurling experience and also as a body of poetic autofiction, one that explores both the trauma and potentiality of the experiences leading to psychiatrization and those of being psychiatrized itself. The accompanying critical component sets out a vision of a Mad criticism, drawing on the notions set out by recent Mad scholarship: that Madness is itself a component of human knowledge production, and should be recognised as such as having intrinsic value, and that Mad people's voices should be central to forming knowledge about what madness is and what it means. Following this, an autoethnographic and non-linear approach to demonstrating what such a mad critical engagement with literature might look like is conducted by means of a depth study of work by William Blake, which suggests that Blake himself was a prominent believer in the value of his Mad thinking, and could be seen as a figurehead for how to write and live Mad experience. The way in which other critics have engaged with the Madness of Blake is also turned on its head in order to expose the way in which critical writing on literature often upholds or propagates 'Sanist' value judgements on the writings of Mad people, in the way it seeks to either 'unmad' writers to give their work value, or to pathologise or psychologise people posthumously, to see madness as a failing that the writing overcomes, rather than, as this theses suggests, a primary driver in the production of Blake's thought and art.

Acknowledgements

It's hard to know who to thank when writing acknowledgements for a project so deeply personal, as it feels everyone who has been a part of my journey through selves and lives is important. Thanks though must go to a few important people and to The University of Sheffield for supporting me to undertake such an unconventional project. Thanks to my supervisors Adam and Brendan for support, challenge and openness to this work, and to Agi too for all your inspiration and guidance for creative writing across the School of English in general, and for supporting me through my MA. Thanks to all my poetry peers in the on the journey, current and former, and to the wider Sheffield poetry community for helping poetry have a place in this city I love.

Thanks also need to go to Mad peers close and distant who mean that living a life where madness is meaningful is less lonely. You hopefully know who you are.

To my ultimate Mad peer William Blake. I feel you with me always, never more so than at the moment this comes to some sort of completion.

Finally, to my friends, family, loved ones. You have supported me and at points held me when this life hasn't felt like it has a future. None more so pip the pup, companion for many otherwise solo days in my head, my parents who have been happy for me to carve my own path and have supported me throughout, and Steph - my wonderful partner - who has been with me through the entirety of this long and often painful journey, holding belief and hope for me at times I had lost it myself. I love you. Thank you.

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. Sections of this work and poems have been published online previously at www.benjamindorey.com which is my own website. This website is where I share my musings around Madness and creative work with peers, aiming to open up dialogue with others around these themes. Sharing ways in which creative responses to Madness shape meaning for us is a powerful mode of connection in my mad communities, whether local or online, and the website hopes to open ongoing work out towards others in the way reading others work has inspired and helped me.

Notes on the text

All references to Blake's own work, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the Erdman edition - The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988). The convention (EXX) is used to reference throughout.

Blank pages are used intentionally as an artistic device in the work. They might be read as voidness and/or unbearable fullness. Potentiality and/or its total absence. Self-annihilation and/or rebirth.

Prologue

... In 'Cogito and the History of Madness', Jacques Derrida writes that Michel Foucault could never fully achieve his aim of 'letting madness speak for itself' as the language he used – that we all use – is in some ways the opposite of Madness¹. Madness, for both Derrida and Foucault, is silence. To write philosophically or academically and simultaneously madly is something I would agree is almost impossible, as the prosaic style of writing with its need to rationalise, to explain logically, to construct, as Foucault does, a genealogy of history railroading us towards a conclusion, always undermines the heterogeneity, contrariety and polyphony of the Mad experience. But I do feel you can write madly, and my own experiences and those of others in the Mad community suggest that madness is anything other than silent. R. D. Laing writes eloquently about poetry as a Mad form in *The Politics of Experience* 'Words in a poem, sounds in movement, rhythm in space, attempt to recapture personal meaning in personal time and space from out of the sights and sounds of a depersonalised, dehumanised world. They are bridgeheads into alien territory. They are acts of insurrection. Their source is from the Silence at the centre of each of us. Wherever and whenever such a whorl of patterned sound or space is established in the external world, the power that it contains generates new lines of forces whose effects are felt for centuries'²...

...Derrida suggests that perhaps literature can trace madness out of its silence in a way philosophy cannot, due to literature's 'duty of irresponsibility, of refusing to reply for one's thought or writing to constituted powers [...] perhaps the highest form of irresponsibility'.³ More importantly as someone immersed in my own madness and in Mad culture, I am surrounded by people creating mad art and responding to art they feel speaks to madness. Mad activist Mary O'Hagan describes her experience of Madness as 'at their most powerful, my words floated in from the blackness, and passed through me onto paper.'⁴ Others, including myself at points, are influenced by

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992) p.33

² R. D Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin Books, 1967) p. 37

³ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992) p. 38

⁴ Mary O'Hagan, *Madness Made Me* < <https://vimeo.com/132294911> > [accessed 20th November 2018]

madness which comes in the forms of voices and visions that are every bit as real to the person experiencing them as the corporeal world; this is a madness which is anything but silent. This kind of experience is what first attracted me to Blake – this suggestion that the messages from visionary or mad experience should be given attention as meaningful, and perhaps written as received rather than interpreted in terms of making them sane, or judging them insane when we fail to derive meaning on societies rational terms... Once I had let go of some of my own assumptions about how literature should function, my world was changed and is changed over and over by engagement with Blake's Mad writing, which is only difficult, I suggest, if you try to economise, to reduce its expressions of infinitude – perhaps drawn from the wellspring of sense that, Derrida suggests, is Madness – to something sensible and/or constrained. Something diagnosed as this or that and reduced in the process. My aim in this project is to make my auto-ethnographic readings of Blake's work – as a mad person – as mad as possible: to dispense with the conventional style of academic writing while still engaging with the work on a profound level, to dispense with conclusions as an aim while embracing them as they arise, often contradicting each other and thus making the work continue to sing...

...The form chosen; of fragments sometimes linked neatly and sometimes departing radically from what goes before; of sentences that sometimes exceed the rules of writing; of personal reflections expanding in aperture to take in the world and then collapsing back to a microscopic detail; of the meaning making that makes my own systems out of engagement with my mad experiences through the lens of reading Blake...this form is my way, as best I can, to reflect how Mad thought occurs in my mind. Often chaotic but not non-sense, irrational but not meaningless, this disorientating thought with little to anchor it except its focus on one poem at a time is my attempt to make madness a form of knowledge creation which can be shared, can grow further dialogue when read and received, can open doors rather than closing them, as I will suggest that, too often, the adherence to 'sane' writing style does by method even if not content. I have also included an annotated bibliography which has my responses to relevant texts to the project, both academic analysis and personal responses which owe something to the way in which Blake makes marginalia and note taking a way of thinking through other people's ideas. (see appendix one for more

detail on this). This is partitioned off from the main body of the work as an aesthetic decision, but one in turn informed by a desire, as stated above, to bring the critical work closer to representing my lived experiences of madness. Often insights come drifting in and out of madness - sometimes chaotic fragments, sometimes fully formed philosophical ideas – that bear similarity to the thoughts of thinkers both present and past. However, it feels disingenuous to then bring those thinkers they align with into the centre of the work, when they had no place in the immediate experience or development of the mad thought or thinking. This is why I relegated this to the appendix, in a practice influenced, as stated above, by Blake's own critical responses to the thinker of his day, which are available to us predominantly through marginalia rather than critical essaying, as he too gives primacy to the unfolding of his thoughts out of direct – I suggest Mad – inspiration in his main work. I feel all this critical work will, however, never match poetry in writing mad experience unfettered by concession to sane language, and I hope the creative side of the project will more succinctly encapsulate some fragments of my mad thinking. Whether either side succeeds will depend on both my ability to mirror madness in language, or as language, but also on the willingness of the reader to rise, even temporarily, into madness. My suggestion is that this is how we must read Blake to experience the work as Blake intended, and I hope to make my own work operate on different but similar planes of Madness; as a series of launch pads, departure points, lines of flight for the reader's own madness's to take hold, to make them exceed or, perhaps, annihilate them selves...

Prologue.1

...I as a singular voice that writes is not a stable I or eye on the world and on m(I) thinking...

...Madness can decimate selfhood, and new meanings develop in the offshoots of this...

...I in this sense serves as a function and a fiction throughout this work, a multitude of inner voices and narratives v(I)ing for attention, not to be confused with a singularity or selfhood by the name Benjamin Dorey, but falling under that moniker in order to gain a seat in the world of selfhood and selves, to make voices in language that on one level seeks to secure a self, that madness then works against or above or under...

...I is the guardian(s) of the assemblage that sits in the searing sun of the name, and I the veil that shields our Iyes from that light...

...Let broken eyes see the light, and alight. Meaning awaits in the wings by which I takes flight of itself...

ONE OF US W(A/O)NDERS

Benjamin Dorey

0

The future belongs to ghosts

Jacques Derrida

1991

Spooky the shadow.

Spooky the shadow walks round
with me ,

But he doesn't have any feet .

He's like a ghost .

He sneaks up

BOO!

He is spooky as he sometimes
disappears too.

by Ben

Prelude: Autumn Guardian

Gnats spiral up sunbeams in a death-dance;
a whirling grave in bus churned air
all hazed with cold and particulates.
On the wall facing up to the window,
cracks in the bricks host shadow dramas;
a theurgical gaze lifts the image beyond the frame.
An anxious wait; a strange music comes near;
drones of all frequencies
fill up my ears.



Vision hooks on a crack in the tarmac;
peripherals curl into caves;
magnesium light streams trace thickening darkness.
Form slowly shapes in the centre,
stretching skywards from pothole puddles –
a Mandelbrot chest plate, entropic black wings;
snickering voices, internal winds,
persona make way as this guardian sings
and her sculptures of thinking take flight –



videos stream along fibre optic nerves,
sound tracked by suddener orchestras – now
a binary blood flow stirred out of time
blends dark cells into the white;
memory's vast apophenia
seems less reasonable and truer
when rippled up; origamied aporia;
an enfolded void of worlds just
out of reach. And incomplete



the past – always projected, dusty,
poxed with film burn –
fades solemnly into the real;
decay now passed in code;
replays once saved for night sweats
now stored on terabyte key rings,
now playing all at once on the sky's screen.
What are we to do with the endless weft

and the warp of this dizzying 0?



In his guardian gaze, our head-in-the-void
is turned to predictions – stereocilia
twitch in response to head rhythms –
but despite new words, new unheard voices,
despite new birthing collisions,
old sagas veil them all.



In seasons of must, the nightmare of history
will always play out on our futures.
No pause to check over our shoulders
for the source of this coursing adrenaline.
Just chemicals to fight the alchemical;
myth sighs into rote
as its hops and skips calcify, becoming
the marching steps that nail us into line.
The reek of déjà-vu is caught too late.



These reveries rise from uneasy truces –
no more running from you, hiding
in underground rooms and annihilations.
No more chasing you until subsumed.
No more hosting your heart in my ribs.
Could a corporate acknowledgment –
an NLP shoulder grip, a loveless
pretense of peace when eyes meet –
be our only sustaining option?



It's so hard to deny a gulp
on an absence of moisture.

Prelude: Aura

first it feels safe, a spirit at your side

then you're a star

black-holed by its mass

Trinity reversed – mushroom

cloud collapsing into shroud –

a bulb of fire and light and sound quick-

shrinking to event

pin-prick nothing

but a squeak inside

So what do you prescribe?

*I was found/ed in Settle.
I was unsettled and in Sheffield.
I was Capitalised, bullied, bully.
I was psychiatrized/
fractured.
I was fleeting, fleeing..
I was not I,
wholly Mad.*

I

Where definition first comes upon us Empire
Jorie Graham

Jubilee

open the skylight
despite the drop below zero
led by the soft sleet's
patter of promise on glass

drawn to the mist
of forming dew and diesel fumes
all phenomenal sounds are
muffled into white noise
pocked by smothered fireworks

one of us tries to remember
a time we weren't haunted –
a memory of cold as
dampening divisions

frost furs rules
the way ice joins leaves in a carpet

explosions refracted through fog
linger on retinas as long as the bounce
of their sound through valleys

stripes of streetlight
frame the dark of the park
and the halting red shift
of signals three crow miles off
on manor top

it's there the thought pauses in traffic
dragged from the warped nostalgia
TV series tucked up the Gleadless valley
to the reverberant air of caves

there's something we need to remember
something whose dream
we've rewound so often
its playback is more noise than image

we drift I drift sifting the crackle
back to grykes and becks
that laid down their patterns
as rhythms that run through
our words and the rain
our landscape and veins

both stilled by the clutch of the cold –
past screens guarding Attermire's Scar
in a cave system named for the crown
a daydream dammed the world's course



now back at the skylight
the city's drone
begins to differentiate

particulars clang apart
as the eye acclimatizes
and the eardrum comes taut

five of us wonder
in separate streets
some sheeted by storm water
some lakes of floodlight and mica
all fading away as we try to right them

we duck and press earlobes
to oncoming dogfights
and the silent oblivion of rocket flight
the faces decaying to dust
the memory dawning this fright

five years old and the torch dies
with our father's voice in the echoing karst
where the clock hands of stalactite drips tick forever
and void lifts the veil from your eyes

as the street sound recedes
and the fog curtains in
and sirens diminuendo

a form takes shape
in the dancing cave shadows
and – hands shaking –
that five-year-old
we part-control
rubs warmth into the batteries

a tungsten flicker
strokes a prayer through the nothing
before laughter smothers everything
and the light tide retreats
to the filament's dimming coil

*it's on you now –
begin
or be gone*

*My eyes awoke in a bustling city,
set beneath forested hills.
Ice capped peaks glowed pink
through the haze of distance.*

*The air had the feel of the south,
dry yet close. Stretching the neck,
grand ecclesiastical architecture
mixed gothic with gaudi with
brut. Rainbow bands
of sea grey gneiss, rose granite,
green slate and umber sandstone
buttressed by brilliant concrete,
opened by mythical glass.*

*Pastel box cars coughed jollily
along cobbled streets
lined with trees- needled like conifers,
but coloured like deciduous autumn.
Birds lined their branches
with such radiant feathers
they seemed to leak
a coloured echo
of each wing beat
into the enfolding air.*

*Leaded fuel and cigar smoke hummed
suspended over cooked eggs and coffee;
I was happy to happen on life.*

*As I wandered the neat grid of streets –
the boulevards tracing the hillside contours,
transversed by stepped alleys
and everpresent shade –
ease was spread by the chatter of people
sat in cafés beneath the trees.
No fear on their lips
while arguing intently,
or demonstrating attention
through carefully released smoke streams
meeting the words of the other.*

*Music played: from bandstands
in piazzas and parks,
from behind the thick-set doors
of the many churches;
pure tone poems ululating the air.
Such peace in this living
I let my body follow my eyes*

*into this world so my tongue might enjoy
the flavours of the breeze,
and my vertebrae match the back of a chair,
taking in life and its passing.*

*Held by worn upholstery, I took the air
in gulps that opened the lungs,
reacquainting myself with breath, the
gentle roar of distant seas rolling in my throat.*

*The collage of conversations becomes white noise,
a benzo for eardrums longing for rest. The cries
of children – so often troubling my ear
like the lost notes tinnitus sings –
completely absent.*

*

*The apricot sky glowed in polished cobbles,
their unique uniformity
exquisite in this light.
Above the hiss of the street rose
tremulous tones from a nearby church,
unblemished by rhythm or language,
voices drifting gradually
into undulating resonances
as they descend and climb
without the leaps of notes
luring me in a siren a promise of love.*

*I pass between gargoyles
guarding the entrance,
pull back the mahogany door
with surprising ease
and enter an atmosphere
thick with incense and sulphurous
matches struck to light prayers;
the smoke enriched with the music
seen in its shaking.
Fabrics tracing the nave's roof shape
shake with sound sung
from the choir, their rows of
vermillion robes, faces silk-veiled.*

*Alabaster plaques for passed souls bore no dates,
something eerie in the translucent stone
and the tone of the air vibrating through frankinscence,
somehow now more sterile than holy,
clasping my throat and*

*forcing a gulp that forced my body to meet my mind here.
And, as if my closing windpipe stopped theirs,
the choir's song fell into silence,
scores softly rocking down through air [rocking through the air/to the flagstones]
onto the flagstones. Turning to face me,
the choir formed a line that crossed the transept,
blocking the sanctuary beyond
where I glimpsed a mooses basket
briskly sequestered
from the tabernacle into the vestry.*



We like Infants descend
In our Shadows on Earth
Like a weak mortal birth

William Blake

Earth Loop

Autumn presses dark on tiny shoulders
prone in the moon-grass forests of the meadow,
hiding, as voices call you back
for home and food and hugs.

But out in the night cold fingers clutch you,
halt your rise as the light flits off,
to leave your damp nose sensing
each brush stroke of the freezing reeds through air.
Ears prick up for the death-hushed footsteps
of ghosts as real right now as your mother's call-

you crawl to the substation,
where senses are dimmed, disabled
by forcefields of frequencies sinking
the octaves of angels into
a singular 50hz hum.



The Market Decides

We are lived by powers we pretend to understand – W. H. Auden.

a returning ache
cold rain
and a film of damp on the mantle

feels like autumn
though the calendar and clock
show the equinox is months off

your thirst for order
normally not noticed
parches the throat

traps you in five parts to order thoughts
which had no such thought behind them
when closest to conception



shrink wrapped
all first fears coalesce
in a christmas market memory

the town chattering
congregates in duffel coats and shellsuits
hot-rocked by sparklers and soapbar

coal dust sparks from the hearth
and petrol thrown
on funeral pyres of livestock

that ignite the barren fells
around the market square
drawing stares years into the future

now then first of five emerges in image searches
hiding from extinctions
in a reconstructed daydream

shielding his eyes as through his own
he hunts himself by scent and sounds
these stills and scanning lasers lead us back to

fast motion over Ravenglass sands
no footprints left among beached crabs
and the silica sculptures an absent ocean
carved in Sellafield's shadow

a mechanised gaze now
clicks between colour and
the monochrome of childhood documentary
dazzling ions as yet
undeveloped in darkness

your own voice calling your own name
phases as it's doubled tracked making it
metallic when re-received

other too cold and too close to be other
than you *we called it Guardian*
then we forgot



the sun of sunday school genesis
irradiates with knowledge
and small feet run for shade and shelter

but end up back at the market square
built of recurring conversations
carols and coughs

the dry of december air
freezes vowels hard selling
chops and legs on beds of ice

o small world bound by cut stone and bricks
limestone scars and repetition
this and there is too much for you



the first kid hides in a subterranean stairwell
head peeping at toe height as ears tune out
the voices and marching tracks of boots on snow

tune in to the hummingbird thrum

of a heart tachycardic for a first time
which always feels like the last

no matter how many times we others
brush this moment
from our futures



the chattering recedes
pushed aside by something preceding
and following him and all of us

fast forwarding from the tideline
along train tracks taken
grey ribbons of road from the booster seat

past white scars of lime and fingers
stroking the ammonite imprints
that insignificance

even as this conjoining rush past
viaducts and pay phones hones
these myriad spheres to a monad

all sound reduced to the tinnitus charge
of a flash bulb reddening his scanning eyes
as darkness explodes for a fractioned second
leaving our gasps on dry light



then ghosts begin their slow and neon dance
with each blink of the eyelids, becoming
like forms we know and yet evading us

the movements we lose between strobe lights
and stressors the kick drums footsteps downloads
the fixtures of cadence
dividing

at first one so solid
a tome stone tablet
or etched
plate

then
divided
down
molecular wholeness dis-
rupted
split
birthing new deathly
energy

so splits more
as sickness,
deformation,
mutates into
another
after that first
rent
usundering

multiplying voices
and so people

chatter becoming crowd
crescendo reaching hum
becoming
one
ready to sing and shout and
break
again

beautiful newly blown glass
splinters showering
refractions
reflections of a light
which if
seen as whole
scorches retinas into
whiteness
but split is full spectra
divided rainbow
ordered in a squall
beneath towering grey blue
cumulous
gold leafed with sunrays

from beyond our horizons

*eyes turn inwards with
and we look at selves
like petri dish bacteria*

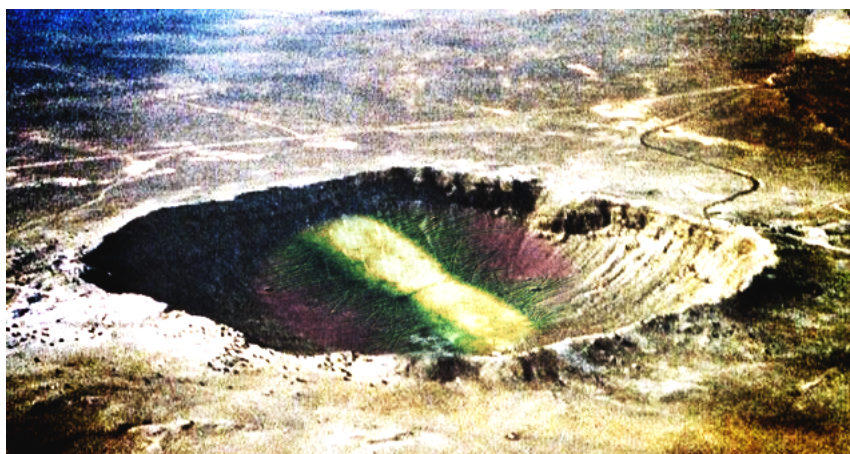
*the turning of earth
propogating beautifully
always splitting*

*alternate worlds
each with its own
hell*

*in parallel,
vision of heaven or*

*those words
never the
transformation*

*like so many
neccesary
of justice.*



some are born

transfixed by the tock
punching pillows then hugging
slow tears to down shoulders

chest feels the breath stretch for days
and the heartbeat for minutes

someone lies waiting for dawn
like love or morphine
it fails to keep its soft promise

a day bereft of openings
another endless night

II

*To be traceable
however small; to be material;
to have status in the record;
to have the rest,
the unwritten,
even more easily scrapped.*

Roy Fisher

To The Letter

Sometimes, my window is swung
by unexpected chords
scored by the page, and the memory.

Today, Roy Fisher's Red Lead
struck a note above two-stroke
and a Vespa throttled skywards
from the booster seat.

Four Star chimes the Tristan chord –
the tinny voice of school keyboards –
the rattle of gales on single glazing;
an anamnesis when knots and scales
could cloak his unfocused penumbra –

small hands stretching a fifth across ivory
counterpoint a 20-year sus4, envelope
attack snappy, release set to ad infinitum –

as red and lead klanged,
so vertigo fell
to the unity of units.



Now equipped with reason for a second visit,
on the class trip Sellafield was merely mechanical.
The rainbow arcing the Irish Sea
became the work of prisms
and the Guardian was hidden.

Schooled in, certainties were as easy to assimilate
as racism. A division addiction, started young,
enriched us through derision. Those who gorged
rose quick and earned gold stars.

Cut grass forced down shirt collars
left skin and cotton lime and crimson,
fading to umber as life decayed.

I watched the process,
absorbed.



A self emerged, so assured and sincere,
it had no need to write



so now we struggle to welcome it in,
to make memories ring true with a time
when the rhythm of vision was Euclidean,
gridded the waves of wind through bracken,
measured its reddening under the sun.

The encounter smiles a protracted smile
that I feel across my lips, and selfhood
sings in major keys, all minor modes shoved
aside with pomp and circumstance.

Don't you want to live?
Notmy lips mouthed with their instrumental grin –
If you don't want to harm then sink,
let the often-dreamt drift of cells
into trees and mycelium sift you
into others,
but don't expect to write
a letter home.

Damnascene

We realised we could
split you
like us,
portioning off the pain.

So started the gulf
between awful dreams
and playground sermons
waving red bound Gideons'.

So started
the tear of desire
from holy sensation;
those orbs of light that

float us off our chair, beyond our host;
the safety and mass murder of salvation.



She Taught Me How We Show Our Love

the wallpaper always changes colour
sometimes I doubt it('s reality
but it's always something
lurid purple or pink

bubble writing
covers pre-teen pop magazines
exercise books
or dating board games we played

but I never grasped

pressures
marked out by colour
coded piano keys
the crackling chrome and ferric
of timetables set to song

conversation races from toys to boys
and who kissed who all strangers to me
but for your stories revolving around
lists drawn in dry wipe ever sliding up
and down like league tables
and evolving like your handwriting

sometimes erased with a flourished fingertip

☆

after you taught me how to love promising penny
sweet payment
I felt like the cat leaping
down from your bedroom window sensing something like sin
taking with him the floating tea lights the glass bowl

a moment paused in freefall

landing on all fours startled pupils un-slit catch
cracked sunlight in a shattered supernova on the pavement
pricked ears ringing with the bottle bank din

something changes
erupting like parched lawns
quenched with rain
but outwardly stuck
at the window pane

watch me watching me watching
something like a loss

but alive and
brimming with tears



The Guest's are scatterd thro' the land
For the Eye altering alters all

William Blake

... I think we were two. We were close, and the space between us was laughter, joy and the abandonment that overcomes the very young, which language fails to score/scare. I think ...

...It was a He this time, I'm certain, whose gentle hand held out some salve. The robed paw crossing the communion rail to turn little heads to heaven; the sensation of promise...

...and what a promise it was, what an enticement. The foggy world of aforementioned fuzzy feeling clears. We emerge from it on the roof of a boundless building which unfolds in labyrinthine fractals of tiles and turrets, chimneys and time. Great wheels churn the smoke and fog into forms. The air is cleared into vision...

...underfoot, a rumble, as if the whole edifice of peakland grit and welsh slate contained some force that I and I might know, sequestered away beneath us. He guided us one by one to an elevator – the space between us came taut like a dog lead trembling with the urge for freedom and closeness, all at once. He said he'd have to part us if we wished to enter the lift...

...so our eye's watched I enter the glassy cube. The silver pithead gears begin to whirr. The lift descends from the skylight of vision and into the void black space, point of entry shrinking to a pin prick...

...Vertigo knocks on my bowels; an iridescence fills the box like liquid pearl. I watch I float in it, and from my eye a teardrop drifts like a soap sud towards my forehead, blessing it on impact. As its form die,s starling wingbeats flutter outwards from my eyes and become another I in a landscape of tin mines and beach breaks churning the oceans approaching tide...

...the spume subsumes us, rushing across the image, becoming a guillotine of darkness that slices I away from the image and I is enclosed by the oppressive cold of space unseen. Now unseen and unseeing, I feeling with now bare feet for solid ground, I seek some sign to orientate my self. All I feel is the textured chill of cobbles slicked with verglass, the scent of a cave that rhymes with an eclipsed memory, leaving only fear in recognition...

...Time passes by in stalactite drips. I scrape my cheek along the stones, and hear their voices whimper. Though sad, it makes me less alone. Then I grasp they're only my echo, returning from the polished stone. I hear my heart thump quicken from without and, sensing its panic, stumble, crawling, falling, through the gloom. The chase makes the almost silent space explode with sound, footsteps returning and rehaunting I off the stones. As I turn about to flee the echo, I echo another I flee...

... Then, as if I conjured it out of the darkness, a floating poster advertising my execution, fonts and style ripped off and out of a western. The rough hemp of the absent noose stills and strokes my throat, calming and closing the breath...

...I'm suddenly rhymed back to the roof. Pupils widen, gasping in the light as the mouth gasps out sounds beyond speech which plea for salvation across all tongues. The sense of pursuit still drives me forwards, the memory of rope reins me back. I see what seems like an edge, and rush towards it, yet as I stare down at others driving in lines along streets below, the roof unfurls to eclipse them again, and the edge retreats away to my horizon. Limbs aching with lactic, heart thrummed out of chest, lungs losing the breath. The limits of my mind chasing itself burning into my body. Chasing the edge without knowing what will be found or saved, the tiredness eventually overwhelms the fear, the rooftiles crack under steps that peter out...

...a void in the structure, the only point of still. The whole where I once stood. The dark, now warm, exerts a pull; the clock drips amniotic. The windless peace and blankness becomes: a something beyond retinas, a taste that licks beyond the tongue, the endlessly circling senses...

An Entrance (1)

Flourescent, flickering hum –
mind so fast the light tube slows slows strobes
the scene stopmotion fractured

a door clicks closed
clutched fingernails mark clammy palms
grasping no going back

behind safety glass
three pairs of eyes
buried in screens

tired hands dance familiar notes
on practice dirtied keys
flat – lacks –
insight –
tired improvisation
around familiar motifs.

Through greasy, finger stained panes
the world chokes on sunlight, daffodils
breaking through soil and tab-ends
in january. Each key turned in ignition,
each beautiful contrail making the patchwork sky
tightens the chest, attesting the truth
of its feelings.

Thoughts well up, diluvian uncture
to the blot of our being, but
another flood of carefully crafted guilt
returns the self. High water mark of hope
is wiped from grey gloss wall with ease
by the housekeeper.

Sad chorus sung in hospec
and stale smoke notes is
locked in this void
away from ears that need to hear.



To keep turning the wheel snapped the twig between the spokes.
The clattering warning returned to steady whirring.
We soon forget the disturbance.

My Favourite Myth

brings liquescence to that
which shatters like bog ice
unleashing its methane firmament,
makes sense of stained glass
sagging like grandparent eyelids
wisened with time.

This human oozing always dis-
rupting the rigid. Spoon-
rapped eggshell, texture
criss-crossing clay glaze.
Oversprays soft challenge
to lazer cut stencil.

Strong lines of wet ink
explore the paper's tiny topography
giving the cursive character
a cursive glance might miss.
Such blooming blankness
unsettles my barren futures –

they were all ice → irradiated ocean →
they were all eyes → long vaporised →
shadows on atom-split mountainsides →

silt blown by unbearable light
into bulbs of glass, sat in cirques,
posed disturbance or distortion of memory.

But accordant with myth, I trace
a slow slide seawards,
the tiny progression of such heft
the glass cracks; crevasses splinter
an ice clear tongue that
overspills the damming detritus,
drooping like spooned syrup or
Christ's stained feet descending to the altar

and the world is vivified, resurrected by
this ancient echo, solids flowing like water
taken aback.

Later, a paper:
a study of amber's
ludic molecular loam
undermines my basis
and the mythic mind fights

the way a cold hand grasps
a slick bottle and fails,
its wholeness collapsing
as soon as the air becomes ground.

Hide and Seek

*Not for me the under bed,
the cracks between the bricks
or the alleyway where
feet forget to tread – I've been
found there already.*

*Not for me the cave behind the car park,
the place beside the paper bin
or the body-brain that beacon blinks
through fell-fog and the stove's coke smoke –
it has been found.*

*There's a bush beside a brook
the foot of which seems hung in space
in which I lie among the piled-up leaves
to face my face down in the loam
and breath my life into the soil.*

*Small fingers push through moss into
the web of roots, and by their routes
I fractal through the earth –
the silence setting in, the thought
ebbing away – you won't find me, no you won't*



find me – here – there – the way humanity drifts
and always moves murderously – bones are
the least of our worries – catechism of sentient
and otherwise – drawn along our lines –
now submit to being drawn – along theirs'

picc line pain flows along and out on subsoil rhizomes–
temperature cooling and thought – a pace less
rhythmical – nothing to beat – just the gentle drones unchallenged
crescendo – spread through warrens – cables we forget we laid

– then – wormsoft crunch through the loam – now the nose
of a mole – its star like light in darkness – searching
to destroy and live – feel the notfear in blind writhing cartilage –
the teeth that break it in twain – the tempting patter of thrush feet –
pulling to the surface – vision erupting through noneyes –

then into the beak and gullet – darkness – nothingness – enzymes –
energy

kissing the earth you melt away – soil ghost – dutifully standing
lying at your post – safe here I think from the gaze –

death muncher – or mulcher – no eyes – five hearts – knows no definition
but light and dark – fear and womb – not safe there –
facing down – facing up – warped narcissus as the
bowing daffs brown down into your finger bed – now now –
not so hidden are we – speaks the form assembling from
femurs – porcelain – always blue veined off white – plant pots and
other terracotta – jigsaw in the terra firma – found here though I'm not –
still making mirrors crack – still feeling other shapes within myself –
mushroom – elm disease – maggot – rabbit –
hidden beneath the soil so I thought – until that eaten moment
winged me up and I saw the scene more economically –

all these smart-arse crows have nothing on me –
all working without remuneration – this is materialism with –
no dialectic – but genome – final point of our profits –
mocking money even as in labs we fiddle it – I grant them
a little reflected glory – for seeing me – but just because you see
doesn't mean you break the chain – Yes – the playground and the fields – small sheep as
wisps of dirty cloud – stained thrice with possession – tails docked
off – that stream where a wasp cloud swarmed from curious stick poke –
sting required imagined anaphalaxis – because genetics – we don't get
apart from stories –

still feel hidden – now above – out of the reach of hurled stones and
slingshots – but not the creep of your ink through our seas – plasticizers
present in the bloodstream – doping violations – small poison in the tonic – or survival
of other – small poison – autoimmune system whacking on the hurt – suppress it with
more – poison – inflamed brain and a congregation of holograph acquaintances –
boiling brain and the laying on of hands – its 42 degrees inside and all tv is showing is
love island – spleen pressing painfully on other organs – tubes bellow – so cold – teeth
rattle together – vomit – skin screams – vomit – water – vomit – skin sloughs off –
windows all beckoning height – curtain rail tight ligature – love saves but for how long
– room fades but for how long – diazepam dazes but for how long – bloods needed but
flesh so swelled they cannot find the vein – needle to main artery – redder than you've
ever seen – neon glow of iron and oxygen – pinprick turned Chatsworth fountain –
pressed cotton bud crimson flower – blooming red through white – another black
flower blooming through light – can't sleep in case you can't wake – ringing in ears and
chest tight – make it through the night – hold tight – hold tight – hug yourselves good
night – keep right margin clear as ice – don't let the leaking ink eclipse the white – don't
let leaking blood eclipse the white – be found – stuck and bound – embodied – can't
deny this sick sensation – the sound of cosmic laughter – the rustle through the leaves –

the loss – the mechanical steel on brass of the school bell – stop messing around its time
to learn – unplug your dirty fingers from the earth – brush off moss and fir cones – eyes
wincing then adapting to plasma tubes – rhythm returns – hands practice the cursive
alphabet – mind soaks up maths by rote – body returns to being a person – the vision
floats downstream – leaving with the turned leaves – so in its way – repeats ad
infinitum

Still/Invisible

*I drift, as normal, through the worlds of religion and myth with minimal effort
carving a place for my self where it can
reflecting these sunless skies
the way an imagined monk accepts the passings of the mind in meditation
cleansed of the tremors de
void of emotions
or, if naming them,
content.*

*As I take to the air, the concrete and forest below
billow with my wingbeats.*

*Towers with vines as structural as steel
support the insides against collapse.*

*Electric traffic hummed through the Euclidian streets
stretching out to the visions horizon
where the mysteries simmer and sing*

*Yet I in my oneness was free of their threat, weaving
my trees and my towers unseen –*

*My form proceeded as kitten claws of wind
across flooded streets patterned with
fractals of uniform light
rather than reflections.*

*And the winds surrounding me twitched
in cymatic mandalas dancing the perfect pitch
of the moment becoming all moments,
kaleidescoping emotions unhitched from their
memories and set free as music.*

*But then one note lost its centre, fell out of tune
becoming twisted, then opaque; dripping thick
blots of ink like entropy onto the city below.*

*Some outside force – quite sudden –
took over my flight. The lurch of
vertigo rips through my diaphragm
and I become embodied, nose diving
into the thick scents of darkness ->*

*patterns of colour and clock time split
into shadows and people and events on film
reels spliced and taped together - narrated – lineal*



I run aground in a city, in half a million voices I can hear but cannot see. A freezing rain explodes into foaming refractions of sulphurous street light on ash stained pavements. I find my feet, and step out to avoid the advancing mall of a drunken party, then stumble among them at the insistence of the trams hectoring horn. The air hums with lager and vomit and fuming taxis lined up to whisk people home. But where home is now evades me.

I pass through walls to find a place less oppressed by noise and emotion, to cut myself loose so the tide might carry me back to my seas of solitude, away from the slap and roar of the shore where these souls are pressed onto land and beached as detritus arranged in lines. I find streets of redbrick divided into digs and seek out a sleeper whose room might match my energies, whose dreams I might enter to exit the pressuring streets.

Pausing in a bedsit mirror, I look out on a bedroom of poorly printed Dali and dog-eared Eliot. I sense a likeness in the sleeper and stare deeply into their head, looking to find a current or path that might lead back to lands of abstracted pattern and colour where I can feel peace. But his eyelids lift, and his darkened pupils bore into mine as if he can see me searching him out from the greasy mirror. Frozen, I watch him fumble with fingers in peripheral vision, first for a blade, then for a rainbow of pills pre-popped from their blisters.

Briefly breaking the fix, he traces the razor over his palm, but I am too transfixed to escape. Our eyes meet again and he walks right to the mirror, looking straight through me and reaching towards the glass with his wounded hand. I watch mine reach to meet it, dripping, then everything goes blank, cold, silent but for drips ticking the time like a faceless timepiece.

An Entrance (2)

Door locked from the inside
yet marked by desperate scratches,
room cloaked with ash, tab-ends
spilling from plates onto threadbare floor
thousands of nerve-shredded breaths.
Scared, soiled corners
ringed with the drone of dung flies.

Driven inside by the suspect gaze –
shoppers crossing the street away
from this lumbered, olanzapine wanderer –
by the catch of doors clicked closed
to avoid the question posed
and vacantly creaking the floorboards.

Small rooms cacophony of criticism
bears down on a coiled boy
on mattress springs vibrating
with the weight of fear shaking
the sunrise black, the beck's
trickle red beneath window.

Inside images torture, hooded figures
debased in first person
despite voices speaking Ur-evil
in language biblical
and personal, Ur-angered father/mother
accents twanging guts like guitar strings
until Ur-wretching over the sink

*Now rising see my antichrist
watching from the mirror
as Ur-options shrink to
ligature, knifeblade
or an entrance into my flickering ellipses,
my eyes black orbs which eclipse the world
as you raise your hand to mine, sirens approaching*



*Time snapped open;
now proceeds so slow
each moment grows a world.*

☆

*A gunclap snatched from
a Remarc record starts the pack
brain sprung open like
cruel gates at Owlerton
each bounding step
now wraps the round
of the track,
a series of spirals
an endless chasing*

☆

*and I'm plague doctor
beaked with carnations and camphor
cloaked in robes of vermillion
extracting soul from the child
I've whisked from the font*

☆

*and I'm pulling the hood
on enhanced interrogation,
1st person Abu Ghraib
facing down the target
as torturer. Target
homogenised as brown skin
by the newsreel, unnarrated
by the hood, unhuman.
Now becoming a person,
as you realise the torture
and deride me as my hands
inflict the blows and feel
the pain not as abstracted ethics
but rather the imposition;
my stories laid over theirs;
a series of ink black bruises
and your voices barking
'trespass' every time I try
to perceive a life in the lee
of mutual destruction.*

☆

*I'm flying b-52s
carpet bombing Tutakhan,
dropping with the whistle of munitions
to see the burnt-out homes and tales
I supported erasing, then I'm crashing
down the towers to justify my actions
which thrive in the white heat
that melts the structure of glass and steel
and blinds the vision into blankness
from which new flights alight*

*You thrust me towards slavery,
to see and smell horror beyond statistics
in a lightless hold. You rush me to the choirs of
St. Pauls, the pain of empire
as reverberating beauty in the
top of the dome.*

☆

*Trespassing again. Shame.
Your voice, my voice,
derides sorry sobs
that cry for the succour of illness –*

*you speaking my mouth,
blame yower mother for biology
letting you in, intergenerational
chemical curse
you build a case on the powerful
shopping lists of ICD-10, the
mind doctors you bow to,
the trembling, silencing
science.*

☆

*Then you're unabsolving us,
undermining the illness defence,
attempting to gain yourself strength.*

☆

*You're laying it thick with the foresight now,
increasing the rhythm of vision,
stacking moments like snare rolls
freeze framing each step
of the projectile we sense
is strobing its way
to our cranium.*

*You're flooding each moment with so much excess
time is laden, stooped with the wait for the next;
The more the bullet's arrival's desired
the longer each of its faltering steps.*

III.

*It is very true what you have said
for these thirty two years I am Mad or Else you are
so both of us cannot be in our right senses
Posterity will judge by our Works.*

William Blake

*Everyone sees madness through their own lens. Mad people see it through
a lens that burns the ground they stand on.*

Mary O'Hagan.

Trinity 2007

What can we do but watch?
as he grasps
four humming lights
is one too many
the mystery is
closed.

He can already see green tags
numbering death blue toes, yet
the cloying sweat melding him
to bedclothes shows he is not gone
yet.

Atop the draws sits the makeshift rattle
dividing by days his poisons for battle.

In his mind no one sees
the slow speech which
shuffles through
intervals of silence.

The hell behind his eyelids hinders
tablets thrown at him to take –
awake – before bed.

What can we do but watch?
as night dies into morning,
and the tin bubble packs flutter
into the bin,

lying amongst torn up paper leaves
where he tried all night
to find trinity.

Maple Ward Maxims

Food is beige and tablets, bright –
no doubting the priority
for swallowing.

Learn to doubt your self:
this is the first step to
wellness.

Ignore your insights
or be told that you lack them.

Learn to sleep through the mortal screams
of every infant animal.

Learn to trust the logic
of sensory sedation.

Learn not to speak of memory
as it will be mistrusted by them,
and then, by them, by you.

The Crush

I once thought we could change the world
but I was browbeaten into a box
without our voices.

Now bound to bare corridors,
I wander, lonely, as my past
becomes prodromal.

Divine light dims
with each paper cup of pills
and the multiple melodies of heaven

cease. The wind leaves our sails.
I'm left without the means
to get too sure.

Coursing

I.

There must be meaning
in dreams that proceed
in dilemmas of proportions

of waist and neck
the belt as noose that
chokes, ends sleep, but leaves
the rub of it, itching;

the wrong side of the bed;
the wrong leg searching
beneath the quilt for the other,
for a friendly glimpse
of recognition's succour

☆

The debts pile up
in gas and cash, in prayer
and air and fire consuming
the head sobbing into
a fiberfill pillow
clumping its way to landfill.

☆

Each thought a dragged chain
clanging and screeching a furrow
through potentialities

it always ends at extinction

☆

How best should I play my part?
(The new, the noose)
((whichever choice – !coward!))

II.

No time for the consciousness
that flight is avoidant
of infinite regression

just Run! Run! Run!
until you take flight
of your self

Hiding above
the wide-eyed scansion
of terror, that stalking
homunculus –

it is almost
pathetic

scurrying frantically
through textured volumes
and accretions of dust,
fingers grasping for
purchase on your soul symbol

then you cough and watch
the white ash emitted
enter its field of awareness

and those saucer eyes rise
to meet you, hung above
like a shadow in reverse

the compulsion is to scream,
as if that beam of sound
could break the bond of sight
cementing you together

but the miniature mouth
returns a perfect replica,
phase cancelling your defence.

you suffocate,
then awake.

Still watched, still closed,
still something.

III.

The city's roar
reduced to a distant river
a home as brittle
as tinder dry twigs which
snapping beneath feet
lead us into a place
like memory

*

The scent of the old piano
hardwood and tusk
tinkling notes between bodiless fingers
voices of those beloved
beckoning becoming

and as if stunned
back to living
your heart regains
place with the making of pace
the thrum of blood like
bootsteps in your eardrum
something or someone
approaching you –

Chest tautologically tautens
Ribs pop as lungs empty
silently –
not night terror because
awake and all remembered
here
just not sure who by
and who's alive to tell it

not the you who started the day
and wrote the opening

who built the home now cracking
like soil beneath
the relentless su(o)n of the age.

Gifts

We receive the gift
of folding dawn into dusk
by means of swallowing.

At night I still dream,
leaping over lands between
map creases, the territory beyond
memory where we find
our selves running –

☆

Police dogs chase our analogue scents,
algorithms our digital – left in code
we agreed to let lay in rushed moments
chasing similitude through servers.

☆

Crush the paper pill cup in a clammy palm
and pitch it to the heavens over Shirecliffe.
Hope it finds its brethren somewhere in
the orange glow of underlit cumulous.
Zopiclone aids the melding together
of worlds the label says it should smother
but the thought still misses the mark
and you fill the empty park with choking
sobs that try to force it free.

☆

Tornados of blue light and shrilling sirens
split air like a sauce overladen with oil.
Uniformed voices press us into the singular,
but we shiver into a chorus on the backseat
conversing with the scenes we perceive
in the chattering of police radio.

☆

Back on the ward – back off the world –
a firmament of 4am fags
glows in the courtyard's dawning.
Quieted eyes speak testimonies,

share communion, defy the dogma of our host.
Internal choirs spin heretical hymns
accepted within this place
where that this is is accepted
whatever it is that this is.



Untitled

Un-constellated, unspoken
though our globe eye slowly scans
its every point of light each night,

though the ear hears its shape
more sharply than the day's,
though dreams defy the humdrum

as the dark rides over horizons.
Distant worlds and events distant in time
draw near in the orbit of its atmosphere.

Voices, too, increase in amplitude –
we reach for each but each becomes
a chorus speaking multiples at once;

the once upon a time is thus revised;
the rustling of the dead on every side.

Crucial Fix

Hammered to clock hands
like crossed beams

bound to the regular shift
of circumference
unable to grasp with
the nails in your wrist

unable to live, suspended expression
like sun or moon on tower or wall
seeing all
but feeling only the pain of the day on
an axle
|

all seconds minutes millenia bleeding
away from the blessed moment

borne by billions of shoulders

suspending desire for its
enchaining substitute, writ on rings of wood

tick tocking our fire into clinical
divine in/escapable light

•

Initiatrrix

descends to flip
the worlds inside outside.
My dactylic toe made other
marks our point of conjunction.

I feel sick, they say I am sickness.

Like Felpham for Blake
you shake this place between prison and paradise,
dying shrubs-cum-ashtrays over-
spilling with knowledge, painfully gained
and almost discarded, fighting for breath
like lungs chaining roll-ups to roll on time
exhale dust, and draw in
the thick air of others

reformed in the condensed breath
into angels lifting us over the ward
out into the sooty air

where each angel of breath
is excess consumption,
injectors forcing ancient death
into chambers idling with power

where each step fractures hillsides
into quarry pits catching
detritus like trawler nets
scouring the seabed of life

thrashing against their lines
we resist external definition,
our voices crack with the hurt
of being teased apart from the head
and the heart's rich mess.

Textbooks dust off the sediment of stories,
transfigure our lives into symptoms
we're told we can target and excise
if we follow the script and swallow
the host twice daily.

The miracle is loud and goes like this –
quick as a carpet of firecrackers
you combust cacophonously
into toxic scraps of paper
diagnosed as disease

but image reels like this
mock the quacks assertion
that as we kill ourselves, we kill our world;

as we kill our selves, we escape their empire
becoming the nexus of their projected fears.

More angels appear, helping the one mind
leap through others, times and places –

*

Right now, failures of record keeping mean a ghost attends a GP appointment. The worried doctor checks they've followed the standard procedures, and moves on.

Last night, three teenage housemates were haunted, hearing the ghost's tinny music in pill packets rattling the air of the suddenly absent room. A séance of spliffs and shared reassurances relieves the worries until sleep, the ghostly presence lost in sativa smoke.

At a house party a DJ is trying to fill a ghostly basement void with bodies, 808s and bassweight, pitching deep cut vibrations from the needle to the room as an exorcism. A ghost trips time as a needle skip, and as it tickles synapses lit up in ecstatic conversation, eyes flicker around its form in collected minds, and groups hugs draw close among the empties and ectoplasm littering the room's dark corners.

*

My guardian, my
archangel brings me back
by beating me in the guts.
Anxious snakes squirm
in the impact's wake
then this whole space
fulminates as metaphor.

Brick, concrete and chemical
chains can't confine us any longer,
we exceed skin and sinew and cerebellum.

Several theatres make and shape our worlds at once;
several critics provide a running commentary,
speaking and acting over and against each other
until we unify their conflict as choir,
you inside my arms conducting, your braced back
now my back braced in anticipation
of the coming crescendo,
our hairs standing to attention
awaiting transfiguration into_____



Self-ish Marionette

It takes some skill
and time within the mirror
to sever strings of sinew from emotion,
to rethread eyes and lips to mime a mind.

It takes tears and recriminations,
bolts on doors and through them,
hours of thankless truth
to learn this trick –

Stunted ventriloquism
as act of resistance;
mumbling tongue
strung to the audience's wishes

shaping the crushed up 'yes' required
for questions of sleep and appetite being 'good',
that 'good' so meek it keeps hope neat
and empty of energy, fight or flight.

It takes some skill to play a part
in the theatre of psychopathology,
some nous to subdue mad movements and mind
to etiology-as-ontology.

Dipped and furrowed brow
strung to akathetic feet,
limbs wrapping the trunk
with invisible sheets –

it's a carefully crafted conceit:
you sign out signs of lowered risk,
they write it into truth. Overhead
we soar above the lopsided dialogue

dextrously twitching the strings,
our limbs tied to the truth in fiction.
As long as glass eyes pass as real
we're free to take our leave.

*

Controlling our face, we shape new worlds;
new paths open up before the will
that sprung from that split in
the bedsit and hospital mirrors.

*

Missing closeness,
I reach out, but, as if
through clearing smoke, you see
the strings that shape my smiling lips sincerity,

you see the me you think you knew
grow hazy and, turning away,
feel the tug of a wire in your wrist.

Losing our grip on the self
deceit required of us in love
we fall apart.

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IV
(METAM)PSYCHOSIS

Our fear and freedom
Stand hand in hand correctly
Should we try to change

☆

Time never changes
It is not the same again
A constant giggling

What if I thought

while suspended in the supermarket car park
the patter of rain and patois
of sirens and laughter and pain
all muted by windscreen glass and steel,
what if I thought as I sit in this cocoon
sheltered from the gaze despite its screen
providing a place I can gaze from.

What if I thought
as the globe chokes on novel protein arrangements
and dystopia writes itself out of fiction
and onto the ringroad liminality
as microplastics mingle in diesel filmed puddles
filled with litter as iridescent in oil
as the magpie's shimmering feather.

What if I thought
as thoughts, frantically, jump from here
to there to where like sparrows
hopping the corporate hedgerows
or thumbprint beckoning the
onslaught of something nothingness,
the tug of the newsfeed reality.

What if I thought
the world doesn't spin around that secreted
moment or event, what would that mean
for meaning? What would shatter or unfurl
if I gave the pain wings, made hurt into
utterance or admission.

What if I thought
I'm not of evil, not soiled,
not damaged goods, not labels.
What if nourishing scars made
movement and healing possible?

What if

I thought.
It overwhelmed me.

Pointless

You study science
the way you train fingers
to clasp small edges ever longer

not to defeat the drag
of gravity, not to cheat
the death of knowledge

to indulge illusion
control, hung above the inevitable
eyes locked on
tips locked on
quartz crystals
counting out time
like a watch.

*

Drilling deeper, you well up
prehistory to illuminate night
so brightly inner space
see cities specked
like stars across the globe.

Forget the imminent extinction
your addiction precipitates.

Each cough a firmament of breath,
proteins an augury of death
like constellations
the universe never notices

*we shudder
all the same*

Sketch for Mallaig

northerly gales whip navy seas
against stubborn lava flows,
moments crystallised
beyond the harbour wall -
persistent doubts
insisting on sanity
nonsense of the sound
no metaphor for thought
but simple becoming of world
out of self receding
into texture and red weeds
revealed with the wane
of lunar desire
for a time



Litteral Drift (On Eigg)

Far from their source
imperial waves
break later, rip slow.

The sands sing as your feet leave.

Ancient flocks graze
empty croft gardens –
war graves flower.

The squeak as your toes curl free.

A Celtic cross of eerie,
eroded scales ties knots
in almost lost reverence

its echo, digitally rendered,
will pull time back
in cities choked on now.

*Your comfort: unprecedented
mocked by glinting eyes among the kelp.*

*

In low light we seize the quiet
with lazered lenses, the explosive
ceasing of a cosmic neighbours life –

stars named the first time
long after their passing
into echoes of light

exceed the speed of endings.

*

Some awe, or similar,
at that voice preceding you
speaking present as hunger or
the waves rolling into your ear

That presence, sifting you back
and forth along the shore,
speaking precious secrets
out of silt.

The How To Bee

bees bounce on
 thermal columns
tracing the invisible
between cartoon sun faced blossoms

the sight isolated warming to the heart
the date late November causing something
between ribs to wince

the task to build a future
out of this

Soteriology

1st

find words that match-
make experience

then
follow –

time
and time again

criss cross (I had)
visions
smudge distinctions
into truth

blur us
into all
into
pause ->
all, facing us
fades from us –

sorry faces retreat
as logs mourn
fully drift
towards the falls
NO

we mourn
fully
drift them –

infinity pools
at the lips
before the fulsome drop
cacophonous beyond

crystalline clarity
comes via a leaf
captured between
silt smoothed serpentine
and surface tension

like a tear
escaping
[named] emotion

contains its essence.

I was wondering a town populated solely by silence. I could swear stories were present, but I felt they were hidden by fear. Some sense of sterility smothered this place like the scent of dettol steals the human from a ward; a comfort but, at the same time, chilling. This cold seemed pervasive despite the scenes mediterranean character. Fruit trees and fountains dotted plazas set between improbable dreamscape architecture sculpted from perfect, pantheon concrete. Cyan pools invited the naked skin to swim, but no reflections met my foot as it broke the surface tension, no sound rippled out with the water pushed aside. I noticed the birds, observing me attentively but singing no songs.

My eyes, unnerved, unchained from my skull - as is normal here. They hovered up like a distant harrier, and broadcast their investigations of this spectral plane back to my waiting head. So often in dreams I find a place deserted, but never before had I come across one so intact. There were no signs of warfare, no rubble, no burning; nothing either to suggest a bricolage of memories returning like shoots on a springtime bed. No corner turns here that fold and collapse one landscape into another memory. No maps which fold the self assuredly into a fretting youth suddenly hung up on examination; the right writing of marker on schoolbag; the approval of bullies and the silencing of barbed words and clenched young fists.

No, this place was presented perfectly, like a landscape suspended in aspic air for eternal examination. My eyes wandered its perfect streets while my body continued to hide.

After a time, the faceless came. I hadn't expected them, but, once there, they seemed almost inevitable. So strange how here the whims of neural lightening are reified to overlords. Like stormtroopers sniffing out the life their very presence quashed, I saw it was they who laid gloved hands on the town like a weighted blanket, pressing it into quietude.

Back in my body, my heart beat raced to a buzz. Then, like FM synthesis suddenly starting to sing a haunting heaven when pitched just so, it returned my eyes to my body, tucked in a hollow behind the servants door to a elegant villa. Cold sumped down there and made arthritic joints recoil with pain like a firedoor thumping closed upon my hands. I watched my shadow dance out my shivers, and after a while I realised it was the only one I'd seen in this world, though the ubiquity of their non-existence meant it was only then I realised their absence. Everything elsewhere seemed soaked by soft light, as if the sun was struggling through cirrus, yet I noticed there was no light source or sign of vapour in the sky: it was a uniform blue.

I became aware that I wasn't alone in my place of hiding, but didn't dare to meet the gaze of my companions. I did not want the silence, however uncanny, to be broken; at least I'd become accustomed to its strangeness.. But then the captive air of the world crackled alive with a voice announcing 'show your selves now, we mean you no harm'. I recognised a mechanistic quality to the voice, one beyond that which the tannoy or whatever its remote transmitter bestowed upon it. As it klanged with some oblique history, crackling through my wires, I realised it was the argot of the faceless who I had hid from in all previous dreams.

With this, the sense of loneliness overrode suspicion, and I turned to face my fellow hollow dwellers. Three figures huddled before me, their faces cloaked in black silk veils that fell in formless waves down to their waists; for a while I doubted whether any being was actually inside. Then, as though they sensed this suspicion taking a hold of me, the two figures to the side unshrouded the face of the one in the centre, speaking hurriedly in hushed tones and in a tongue I could not place.

As the veil was lifted, a sickness came over me. A seemingly shrunken figure rasped in words I could not grasp nor decipher, from lips just clinging to their skull as the skin seemed to rot around them, as if it was irradiated. But the expression on what face remained communicated great urgency and, through movements of eyes gradually becoming lidless, through the tightening of newly exposed sinews into expression, I understood that the gaze of whoever was ruling this land must at all costs be avoided if I wanted to escape this fate. Those eyes, unblinking by virtue of nothing being left to blink with, held mine desperately for a few stretched moments, before the figure collapsed into the silk that had hidden its hideous aspect, leaving nothing but a fistful of dust.

Priviledge

thallasophile from fear
 tug of riptide
 willingly ridden
 away from earth flesh

Repelling land
 where step secure
mind rests
 to our detriment



For the Moment

Explore each
 freeze framed
 seamed
totality. Wonder around the para
dox of things
 alive but
 paused,
 see the
verisimilitude of
 argument suspended –
depowered victories
 gained through volume
of words de-
 ride themselves.

the slip

on the roof the truth of trespass hits you
impolitic back braced against
the vertigo of voidness

cheek to the heat of sun kissed brick
the wind rubs the taste of diesel soot
and ancient haar across your tongue
and your heart-drum quickens
not with predictions
of time's unfolding threat

but with its stumbling
like a misplaced step
the moment stretched forever in correction



Interlude: Butterfly Effect

The butterfly's wingbeat
somewhere expanded all of it –
a catalyst for more metamorphosis.

That fluttering image,
made for science then
wrought from words,
scaffolds columns of thought
that end in space not ceilings
nowadays.

Yesterday's glass tower and
childhood's weathered stone –
paths well-trodden and
buffed to a sheen by hobnails,
memories and hydrocarbons –
all reflect your form.



That hollow fear that's you in neural networks justified
the fact that the latch let itself
and the door open up
so frozen air and a fox screech entered the room.



*The ghost shouts: Boo!
Without making a sound
But you feel its footless presence
and that name – Guardian –
leaves sleeping dreams
to find you once again.*



So later – on route to the airport – I carry whatever comes in,
Ears, eyes and pen tip pricked for that spirit.



My flights on the plane
leave the window and soar, suspended
on light reflected –
sunlight beams up from seas and snowfields.
I trespass on the wing beats
of angels and birds;
what might stop

this transgression dissolves with
your entry to me.

Old words and worlds regroup
anew around our conjoined
conjuring form.

Alpine choughs
surf thermals far below.
This peregrine dive into others' eyes
no longer induces vertigo;
feathered shoulder blades
beat so instinctive we forget the time
they were brought into mind
by mind.

Our shadow darts below,
across glaciers and seas,
across runways, apartments
and memories,
places explored on foot and by book,
in hire cars and from afar.

The sun on our winged back cools with altitude –
science mocks the waxy wane that myth predicted
and we mock science as our blood and skin freezes
and still we can kick the sun about the sky.



Then, as it dips, its echo on the distant sea eclipses
the dull earth around it – all else is pitched into black
and our eyes itch as if filled by sand on the wind.

Clenching lids shut only rubs the grains
– Blake's infinite worlds –
painfully into the lens, until, eventually,
our shadows are all we perceive
in each. Whether eyes are open or closed
the scene seems the same

Another sense of falling seems to last forever;
there is no ground to hit, only space which keeps stinging as our scalp
splits it asunder, only choirs of tearing noise
and enveloping thunder –



A hand grips our wing and we turn to hear our voice in the air,
saying, 'you're okay'...

It rings for a moment, then another wingbeat
returns us to the plane seat,
separate and single,
my still gripped pen spitting ink
onto still blank page.

I think it's something to do with cabin pressure.

Velocities

*My eyes awoke on a sandbar,
untracked grains unblemished like
moorland the morning after snow. The air hisses
with the frequencies of wind
through distant machair, the lapping
encroach and retreat of
grey-blue-brown ocean
forms fresh valleys
with each pulse
exceeding the previous.*

*Distant fells arch one horizon;
the bright but gloaming
light from a sunless sky
casts the same pastel palette
over screes and the seas
as they vanish into curvature.
This constancy of tone and
the speed of the breeze
stroking the shore
pauses the moment,
the waves of amplitude
flatten.*

*Breaking this stasis, violence.
Lunar force awakes my thoughts,
gravity lifts my absent
heart to throat and I'm
thrown into motion –
racing the glassy sea
towards blankness –
eyes streaming salt trails
into the rush of motion
blurring things into process–
driftwood
cola bottles
ghostshipsfloating
boneserodingstories
ofcocklepickerssnagging
inlobesstirreduplicate
oilpaintssmudgedwiththe
thumbuntilallcolours
andalllightsalignwithwherever
the force directs us.*

*When some terminal speed is reached
the air becomes sludge, setting*

*the thought like concrete,
faltering where the sea
glimmers beneath
as if the sun hung
directly above it.*

*When all is photograph calm,
narration stops.*

*Then shearwaters alight.
Like a seat belt catching
or a bungee enacting eternal return
my absent neck snaps forwards, as I'm
sprung rearward like a flashback
away from the light,
towards solid coast from the sea's
collapsing quiescence.*

*No smudging this time
just increasing sense of mass,
a scatter of captures that
reaching my breaking point
shatter.*

Passing Viewpoint

...but sometimes, though
through train windows

the landscape, trees
and hills are still but
for a breeze through branches

...this moment, serenity
passes knowledge

the stones and soil
unturned outside
the head projecting history...



Duvet Daze

Most grandiose guardians arrive
in the swaddling of duvets
unmade at midday ridged valleyed
thrown into relief by cloud quilted light.



The plastic pen leaks oil. The plastic lens
of glasses slick with oil. The toil it lets us transplant
defends it in the dock of my head before
my bitumen boot prints through Emirati terminals
are recalled as un-erasable evidence –

Ligeti's Requiem drones from my brain
Some filmy stain of significance
Slipped
Through the in-flight entertainment system
Cue panoptical bedroom daze at 38,000 ft–



The guardian's laugh is a learning
and a torture, the reason and the
pending diagnosis. It plots
the line from each sweet taste
to starving mouth; shelled house;
our encaged Syrian gnaws wooden fingers
tripping decency alarms shouts to stop
from the inner-image-police. I feel sick.
Am I sick? Am I? At some tiny level
the trope of synapses flashing
juxtaposes composes new forms
of chemical melancholia. as irresistible
as growing into the void
the heart pumps faster towards
death. The scent of it
intersects somewhere
with the fake pine of toilet duck
rhyming along body-brain-highways -
no smell more dead than this.



How to give this form and keep it true?
How to con the reading eye to catch the
 light like
 silver ions
as mirrors
 flit away for a fractured
second?

How to make the space of silence sing
 with words that vainly limp along a line?

The guardian sneers
 at these lame attempts
to catch chaos in a seesaw of verbal ratios,
then
 spiderwebs a thread that links our lives
in spirals
 between the pins we pressed
onto maps to stake our place
 as independent now
children's' fingers worked to bone in mines
 scratch the dark side of the touchscreen, making
our own flinch away from the greasy scroll,
for a moment.

It's not fact but there's truth in that.

Brent Crude and Coltan well in the tear ducts
dulling the eyes,
strengthening vision.



A pill, or a bunch, could clip this thought's wings,
take the grip of its roots from
the loam of the waking mind;
money and titles and naming
could carve its images into stone.

But
though the babble inside
might ask you to end it,
merely muting it makes
its accusations true, and, decayed,
they return like a note through a tape delay;
each time more indecipherable,
the pain a fuzz that cloaks its source.

Should I suffer,
still and in-affective at the signals
and junctions life railroads me towards?

The less you sense yourself, the more the bullets, blades
and bombs make sense. Or is it the reverse that saves?

Desertification

It's when, via our doings,
the verdant land shrinks
under amplified sunlight
unable to escape;

when an overplanted crop
cracks the soil into patterns
repeating to arid infinity,
variety quickly retreating
into monotropy.

*

There's something to be said for it,
a beauty formed in measured miles
of soil and sand that stretch
the reaching eye towards horizons,
to indigo endings of insight –

It's easy to see the full sweep of wind
reflected in rippling dunes
lined up like sets of waves on water,
tremoring slower and slower

*

The desert metamorphoses moisture
into sculptures of its absence
the way war becomes numbers
and maps of moving borders,
becomes BREAKING on ribbons
wrapping news screens;

the way famine is made up of millions
and logistical questions in brains
which shield us from the pain of unsalted blood

or too salted tears which mark the moment
a cradle of stories becomes
a bundle of bones.

*

Desertification is the metempsychosis
of a life up to now

into words that buckle the soul
beneath the weight of their burden,
pinning it into the ground:

*Soldier, schizophrenic, refugee, LEDC.
Migrant, violent, maladaptive, primitive –*

Desertification is a drought,
a parched throat struggling to
get its own words out:
it's hard to weave hope
when branded by certainties
which call our stories into doubt.

*

We sow words so when rain does come,
we're ready to grow a greener world –
words that hold mystery and
moisture, movement and flow,
which fertilise barren soil:

*river, stream, mother, lover,
brother, sister, father, friend.
Heaven, hell, home, memory,
hopes, spells and dreams –*

*

Two figures who've learned to survive in the desert
turn towards one another - brimming with belief.
They open their palms, which - like poems - snatch stories from silence
by way of affirming faint lines –

no story can flourish without access to ears
who, by way of hearing, nourish.

*

Open your tales towards me and I will
unpick the clasping fist encaging mine.

Let them meet and interweave in
the warp and the weft of unfolding understandings.

Let the parched soil and throat be quenched by streams of sharing.
Let those seeds of uncertainty grow into trees
that grow into forests of hopes and of dreams.

Watch where unfurling flowers and leaves
could lead if only we let them –

Fugue

So all the teenage years of riffing
variations have brought you to this
 humming on the rooftop
just you
 an uncoiled rope
and a feedback loop whose
 strangle-tone screams at the streets

the wind is already the
 rush of trajectories down-
wards
 stripping the heat from
your sweat beaded face

but as knees spring to leap
 some song rises up to meet you
and the sepia world you imagined fading
 vivifies with colour

*

two lavender smoke streams
 diverge and loop

a gold-fringed infinity eight
through the sunset's
stasis

through a distant window
tiny fencers' feet retreat and
thrust in a constant dance
of fluent martial mirrors

flocks of starlings
flex like the rippling muscles
of salmon writhing
on watercourse ley lines

a constant tone
in a single ear
oscillates
in the fulcrum
of your head-between-headphones-
the drone now vibrato
through newly
synchronized
synapses

*

now remove the stave
and join the dots
watch symmetrical shapes expanding
 and contracting
antithesis to span us: a dyad
 or perhaps an
 incidental chord

a corpus penned in black
 or graphite grey
but either way not
 you nor me nor I whose
fumes are always prismatic

we walk with free pace
 between walls of refractory
notes in a prison that blooms
 and withdraws in time

immune from exegesis

*

eternal return
sings the burning
fugues of a furnace

its hexing chimney smoke
traces the unseen
helix of spun city breezes

receive their weaving
recoil the rope
and hop
down the stairs
back to the humming
enigma below
with the tremulous tempo
to code it

Prayer

O Guardians
help us see the voice's
heavy, hidden body
pressing down
our weary shoulders.

Help us see it – old and gleaming
white and sane
enchaining with
the question it sustains
(and which sustains it) –

explain yourself –

Help us see it so
that we can aim
the often missing reply –

to who?

Help us turn that magnified light
back on itself.

Pin pricks of brightness
ignite into fires
fuelled by their own burden.

Envoi - A Madness

There's no space here for wrong or right –
the split through you and I which they call sane.
Pain becomes the wings by which we fly.

It's only silence when you feel it's not quite
clear, *demanding stillness from the foaming rain* –
there's no space here for wrong or right.

Sense dances through the walls in noise and light –
not counterpoint; the growth around its claim –
pain becomes the wings by which we fly.

A vision testing bounds of depth and height
disorientates like oil spilt on the pane –
there's no space here for wrong or right.

It rainbows around the subject, clasping tight
then loosening like notes held in sustain –
pain becomes the wings by which we fly.

That subject – us – unshackled by divides
that soothe the impact of the valent strain –
there's no space here for wrong or right –
pain becomes the wings by which we fly.

I.

...Madness. A word so loosely descriptive that society, science and their lovechild, psychiatry, have spent the best part of the past 150 years attempting to divide/ deride it into a manageable nomenclature. A state of mind that is often denied by those supposedly experiencing it, yet more recently one which has been embraced by some of us for its very vagueness; that quality proving emancipatory for those of us wounded by the knife of psychiatric terminology. A terminology which cuts people adrift from an unstated yet implied 'normal'; which provides society with justification to other and discriminate against us; to lock us up against our will having committed no crime other than difference; to inflict with legal 'justification' medications which turn out the lights, cut us off from our stories and cause iatrogenic effects that, on average, steal ten years of life from us.⁵ All this under the guise of compassion and medicine, a corrective mechanics for malfunctioning cyborgs who've tuned in too far to the echoes of memory and history....

...As Foucault, Laing, Cooper and Szasz all highlighted, the label 'mad' served the enlightenment project perfectly. The loss of reason (in the most narrowly defined sense of the word) was at various points put down to primitivism, race and ethnicity, gender or culture. But as society supposedly rid itself of the shackles of racism and sexism and

⁵ M Joukamaa. [Schizophrenia, neuroleptic medication and mortality](#). *British Journal of Psychiatry* 188 (2006):122-127

the law sluggishly moved to follow this trend, the mad found themselves enshrined in law as the sick, society ((un)coincidentally managing to find a nomenclature where those other intersecting forms of oppression could continue to thrive under an illusion of medical objectivity)...

... I live among a largely liberal community, who are now rightly outraged by terms of racial or gender based violence. Yet my friends often still use 'nutter' or 'mental' to describe people or opinions they disagree with at home, in work and in public, and use a cultivated learnedness around 'mental illness' – pushed at us from internet adverts, billboards, celebrity endorsed anti-stigma campaigns and documentaries – to analyse or judge their friends unwell, whispering behind their backs that they should take medication or be locked up, that they lack insight; ultimately implying that their all too real struggles and distress are merely the meaningless symptoms of their psychopathology, and that the ill deserve their sympathy, perhaps, but not their attentive ears as equal makers of meaning about what it is to be human...

... The problem with the leading anti-psychiatric figures is that they too were really of the 'sane' position, looking with fascination at the 'insane', at least when not dabbling with mind altering substances, and ultimately, they still treated the 'mad' as 'broken', just broken by other means than pathology. For Szasz, ultimately, the Mad were just Bad; for Laing they were broken by their home or society; for Cooper, by language and its politics. While I agree with many of their ideas, these figures set the tone of anti-psychiatry for too long without foregrounding the voices of those labelled mad themselves. Jane Ussher suggests this was part of how they gained credibility while not ultimately challenging the status of professionals like themselves as the arbiters of knowledge in the field: 'while anti-psychiatrists were themselves incredibly distanced

from the material factors in the lives and experiences of mad people – as experts revolting from within their field of expertise rather than patients revolting within the asylum – their “emperor has no clothes” style argument “proved both seductive and convincing.”⁶ ...

... Laing, especially, makes elegant statements in his writing about how the mad are abnormally alienated and thus free of the normal alienation that is cultivated by society and serves as the status quo, positioning madness as a potentially radical mode of being⁷. His notion of schizophrenia as ‘one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break in the cracks of our all-too-closed minds’⁸ has been taken up by sections of the Mad community, such as Mad Pride and The Icarus Project, as a part of a foregrounding of the prophetic and visionary potential residing in Mad experience⁹. Laing also, significantly for this project, felt that Blake’s work contained great insights into Madness, finding Blake’s notion of ‘chaotic non-entity’ a useful concept in his understanding of self-division in his first book *The Divided Self*. However, Laing feels confident in declaring learning from Blake because he feels that he ‘somehow, he knew about [madness] in a most intimate fashion, while remaining sane.’¹⁰ This latent sanism, that to be a knowledge producer of value one must be declared sane, means Laing gives Blake’s thinking a value he doesn’t attribute the case studies that populate the book without first going through the conduit of his expert and sane decoding/formulation. As my project hopes to show, not only is this attitude harmful to Mad people, but it also denies Blake a place among the Mad, something

⁶ Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkan, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 132

⁷ R. D Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin Books, 1967) p. 25

⁸ Ibid. p. 107

⁹ < <https://theicarusproject.net> > [accessed 20th November 2018]

¹⁰ R. D. Laing *The Divided Self* (London: Pelican, 1970) p. 162

which seems strange given how clearly his thought, whether represented in art and poetry, in letters or in biographical accounts, defies/exceeds any conventional model of sanity or what is considered sane thinking...

...More recent writers about spiritual dimensions of Mad experience hark back to Laing as a counter to what they see as the secularization and normalizing approach of some within Mad activism, who, drawing on the social dimensions approach of disability studies, try to position Mad people as survivors of systems that disable them but in doing so diminish the radically altered perspectives that Mad experience can give. Seth Farber is one such contemporary advocate for Laingian ways of thinking, and draws heavily on his ideas in his book *The Spiritual Gift of Madness*, but Farber too is a professional positioning himself as an ally of the Mad and despite going further than Laing in giving space to uninterpreted Mad voices via interviews and testimonials in his books, he still often projects his own strongly held beliefs and meanings onto their experiences. For example, he credits the founders of the Icarus Project – Sascha DuBrul and Ashley McNamara – with having ‘dangerous gifts’ that mean, in DuBrul’s words, ‘[the mad are] the only ones that are crazy enough to think they can change the world and have the outlandish visions and drive to be able to do it’.¹¹ Yet when further experiences of madness lead them to change their perspective on this in a way that Farber is disappointed by, he describes them as having had ‘breakdowns’, while he used ‘breakthrough’ to describe the Mad experiences he agrees with. He is taking

¹¹ Farber, Seth. *The Spiritual Gift Of Madness: The Failure of Psychiatry and the Rise of the Mad Pride Movement*. (Toronto: Inner Traditions, 2012) pp.50-52

Laing's lead in doing this, as also evidenced by the way in which he relates the initial aims of The Icarus Project to Laing even while acknowledging the founders had never read Laing's work. As I will explore, Laing was both an advocate for the transformative power of going mad, or allowing madness to flourish, and an oppressive figure when people's madness expanded in ways that didn't fit with his own models of spiritual and existential transformation...

...I suppose that is my central difficulty with reading Laing as a Mad person is that when talking about actual people he encounters in his psychiatric practice, he often builds his meanings onto their experiences rather than letting their own voice and meanings to be heard, to unfold. When we hear what madness means in Laing, we are often hearing what his patients' madness means for Laing, not his "patients" unfettered understandings of their own madness's. Is he thus simply replacing one voice speaking for the person and their experience with another? Frustratingly, to me it often seems so, and by avoiding the challenge this poses, Farber and others who develop Laingian ideas uncritically perpetuate this sympathetic silencing. In their book *Health Communism*, Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant conclude that, as a whole, the anti-psychiatric period was influential but 'failed to deliver on any of its promised goals to patients.' Though figures such as Laing, Foucault and Basaglia are still influential to contemporary mad movements in terms of some of their theory, 'most anti-psychiatrists had never made the transition from theory into action.' As Adler-Bolton and Verkant note, 'their resistance was decidedly professional and still distanced from their objects of liberation: *the patients themselves*. Anti-psychiatry rarely crossed the transom of the

expertise barrier, remaining firmly grounded within the realm of institutional critique from the level of doctor, therapist, and hospital administrator'¹²...

...This might seem at one level a harsh critique, especially considering some of the projects Laing, Esterton and others associated with the Tavistock in the UK engaged in, such as the ideas behind the Philadelphia Association and its zenith in Kingsley Hall, or Basaglia's work in Trieste, both of which aimed to bridge the gap between clinicians and patients on some levels. But an examination of the praxis of these thinkers does demonstrate a continuation of an attitude of professionals observing and theorizing about the effects of experiments they designed, rather than a giving over of power to the patients or 'objects of liberation'. Positive reappraisal from within professional groups working within psy professions and academia have tried to highlight the compassion and person-centered nature of Laing and Basaglia's work especially, but these groups themselves are seemingly blind to the diminishment of power that the patient/subjects experience when it comes to the right to form knowledge about what the experiments outcomes meant...

...one such example is the undoubtably professionally radical work Laing and Esterton undertook trying to study the way in which families interacted and searching within it for clues as to how what psychiatry labels symptoms of psychosis might actually be products of family systems, or 'the authors suggest, tortured strategies to deal with unlivable situations.'¹³. Believing the relations between family members, but also the physical environment in which such network relations took place, to be key to a deeper

¹² Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) pp. 137-138

¹³ Cheryl McGeachan, "'The world is full of big bad wolves': investigating the experimental therapeutic spaces of R. D Laing and Aaron Esterson *History of Psychiatry* 2014. Vol 25(3) 283-297 p. 286

understanding of how such 'tortured strategies' might come to be, Laing and Esterton initially created an experiment centered on creating short films of families in their home environments, thus hoping to study people within the interfamily and situational geographies that 'tortured strategies' emerge in, or in their words 'to explore the possibility of making reliable and valid observation of the kinetic patterns in these families'¹⁴. This process enabled them to draw important links between interpersonal and environmental settings and the development of belief systems that might attract the label 'schizophrenic', but the experiment also in a very material way created objects of study out of people's lives, which it was then down to professionals to interpret in order to form theories of understanding and meaning, to achieve in their eyes a 'valid observation'. The 'transom of the expertise barrier', as Adler-Bolton and Verkant put it, is not crossed or breached in this methodology...

...The closest that Laing, Esterton and others associated with anti-psychiatry - such as David Cooper and Clancy Sigal - came to creating spaces that broke down the traditional distinction between doctor/professional and patient followed, as their group of psy-professionals and artists in 1965 formed the Philadelphia Association. Between them, the 'brothers', as Sigal coined their group, envisioned spaces of co-habitation in which 'patients' and professionals could live alongside one another, building on the experiments Laing and Esterton had conducted at the Tavistock which they believed showed that the environment, both in terms of its interpersonal and spatial geographies, was key to understanding mad people's experiences, and also to

¹⁴ R. D. Laing and A. Esterton, *Sanity, Madness and the Family: Families of Schizophrenics* (London: Penguin, 1964) p. 13

transforming them¹⁵. It also built on previous work by Cooper, such as his setting up of a ward in 1962 as ‘an experiment of anti-psychiatry. Villa 21 was ‘was a ward where staff were no longer put “in charge” of the “patients” and it was therefore up to the “patients” to decide when they were treated or not’¹⁶ The ‘brothers’ met regularly to share ideas for creating these spaces, but it was when Kingsley Hall became available in 1965 that they came to their most famous fruition...

...Opinions of Kingsley Hall vary hugely: to the psychiatric mainstream at the time it was clearly seen as a huge threat, and an ethical failure on the part of the doctors and therapists who instigated it. It also catalysed a significant awakening in the public consciousness, coinciding with the wider countercultural movements of the late sixties, as to the repressive and cruel nature of psychiatric practice, and the origins of mental illness/madness in unlivable social geographies rather than neuropathology. Morton Schatzman said of the central attitude of Kingsley Hall that ‘I think it was a very important part of the ideology behind the view of Ronnie Laing’s that what we called psychosis might actually be a kind of awakening that people who were around the person who was psychotic weren’t recognising as such. What was needed was a place where the person who was undergoing a psychotic experience would be treated with a kind of respect and caring, and if they could go through this experience it might be a positive, spiritual experience. Psychiatrists were arresting this, what was really a kind of natural way of finding oneself and also maybe finding God or finding enlightenment, and that people were interfering with this process by giving people drugs and by

¹⁵ Cheryl McGeachan, “‘The world is full of big bad wolves’: investigating the experimental therapeutic spaces of R. D Laing and Aaron Esterson *History of Psychiatry* 2014. Vol 25(3) 283-297 p. 291

¹⁶ Ibid p. 292

electric shock.’¹⁷ In order to create the conditions suited for this, the ‘brothers’ of the Philadelphia Association ostensibly committed to dismantling both familial hierarchies and those of the traditional mental health system: “We aim to change the way the ‘facts’ of ‘mental health’ and ‘mental illness’ are seen. This is more than a new hypothesis inserted into an existing field of research and therapy; it is a proposal to change the model. If one thinks of oneself primarily as a patient, doctor, social worker or nurse, one will find it difficult to meet across the subtle ambiguities and pressures that exist in families and mental hospitals. To explore the contradictions in communication that at times may lead any of us to act, or to be seen, as mad, we needed a community with a flexible structure, where people did not have to be forced into such roles as doctor, social worker, nurse or patient.”¹⁸ Yet whether these goals were achieved at Kingsley Hall in an authentic sense is questionable...

...Various accounts of life at Kingsley Hall exist, most famously those co-authored by perhaps the hall’s most famous resident, Mary Barnes and therapist-resident Joseph Berke, and those in Adrian Laing’s biography of his father’s life. What is apparent in both accounts, though Mary Barnes impression overall of her Kingsley Hall experience is a positive one, is that hierarchies of control and of psychiatric violence still existed in Kingsley Hall, even if in modified forms. Mary Barnes was permitted to go mad, even encouraged to do so, by Laing and Berke amongst the other ‘staff’ in the hall. At points a real kindness, one Barnes had felt so lacking in her encounters with conventional psychiatric systems, comes through. Anger, despair, a desire to return to infancy and to be treated as an infant were all tolerated - as were her frequent defecation and

¹⁷ Dominic Harris, *The Residents* (London: Self published, 2012) p. 20

¹⁸ RD Laing and A Esterton, *Sanity, Madness and the Family: Families of Schizophrenics* (London: Penguin, 1964) p. 20

urination – as part of an awakening or transformative madness. In the book *Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness*, co-authored by Barnes and one of Kingsley Hall's 'professional' actors Joseph Berke, these cycles are recounted in vivid detail by both Barnes and Berke. While it is clear that Barnes desired to be treated as an infant, even at one point wanting to be tube fed to recreate the experience of being in utero, it is often disturbing to read how much power Berke and the others wielded over her. This included what appear to have been noit uncommon incidents of physical violence, which Berke blamed on Barnes behaviour: 'Joe dragged me in, slashed me across the face, crying in anguish: "Oh, why did you make me do this!" My nose poured blood, as it always did. I broke, I cried and cried.'¹⁹ It is hard to read, as a mad person who has experienced psychiatric environments which absolve themselves of their violence by blaming it on the person subject to it regularly, this is anyway other than abusive. However, in Barnes case this does ultimately seem to have led to benefit: she reports that 'In a particular way, Joe recreated, reformed me. I was able to let him, because I trusted him'(p.221)²⁰. By letting Berke exert such power, Barnes does have a degree of agency. However, reading others accounts of Kinglsey Hall it becomes apparent that, though their ideas around psychiatry were radical departures from the norms of the time, the brothers continued its legacy of wielding power, of coercion and control...

...

...James Greene, who was resident at the hall between 1968-9, though in language itself uncomfortable to me as a mad person, with talk of people being 'totally schizophrenic',

¹⁹ Mary Barnes and Joseph Berke, *Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973) p. 124

²⁰ Ibid. p. 221

describes the hall as a place of experimentation, but only along the prescribed lines of its most powerful figures. He suggests that ‘people who were totally schizophrenic didn’t become more sane, on the contrary. A lot of people tried to kill themselves, two people while Morty was in charge. As far as I know, the schizophrenic residents ended up in orthodox mental hospitals when Kingsley Hall closed down. Whether it was helpful not to be drugged up was another matter. It was just an experiment that had more value to the saner residents.’...

...Clancy Sigal was another harsh critic. When undergoing a crisis of his own, the ‘brothers’, feeling that he might be a risk to the experiment, took violent and coercive action: ‘That night, after I left Kingsley Hall, several of the doctors, who persuaded themselves that I was suicidal, piled into two cars, sped to my apartment, broke in, and jammed me with needles full of Largactil, a fast-acting sedative used by conventional doctors in mental wards. Led by Laing, they dragged me back to Kingsley Hall where I really did become suicidal. I was enraged: the beating and drugging was such a violation of our code. Now I knew exactly how mental patients felt when the nurses set about them before the doctor stuck in the needle.’²¹ It is clear from Sigal’s account that in his experience Laing was a very authoritarian figure in the space, and he has to feign quiescence in order to escape: ‘Choosing life over death, I put on an act pretending that I had rejoined Laing’s obedient flock – which relaxed the doctors’ hysteria – and when they were all safely asleep I slipped away from the Hall back to my flat. For months afterwards I slept with a baseball bat.’²² A picture emerges of a space in which radical

²¹ Dominic Harris, *The Residents* (London: Self published, 2012) p. 22

²² Ibid p. 30

approaches to madness and healing were permitted only the lines considered appropriate to the leaders – none of whom were the mad people they claimed to have broken down the barriers between in terms of professionals/ patients. Those men (and all the leaders were male) who's vision shaped the space were also those who policed it...

... In one recollection of a resident in Dominic Harris' book, the normality of this violent policing is conveyed by the casual way in which its related: 'I used to say to Joe, well what do you do when someone starts having a major freak-out and it's really upsetting everyone else? And he said, well, we used to sit on them, literally sit on someone and wait. David Cooper was like that, they were Huggy Bear characters, they weren't beyond giving you a slap.'²³ Across various people's testimony, the misuse of power and the hegemony of Laing, requiring people to be 'his flock' becomes impossible to ignore. James Greene summed up this, saying: 'He misused his power enormously but he certainly had a lot of power, yes. He was probably the most unethical person I have ever met.'²⁴ Even amongst the 'brothers', Laing's authority became increasingly hard to challenge. Esterton ended up leaving the community after a disagreement over dinner, after which, as Noel Cobb recounts, 'Aaron had gone a bit too far with Ronnie, who had tried to push things. And the next day Ronnie was saying that he had decided that people who were not actually much good to Kingsley Hall, who had actually come there to be a part of the place, should leave. So Aaron had, within a day, decided to move out.'²⁵ Adrian Laing gives an account of another falling out in which Laing asked Esterton to remove his glasses, which he did, believing Laing had seen something on

²³ Dominic Harris, *The Residents* (London: Self published, 2012) p. 22

²⁴ Ibid p. 61

²⁵ Ibid p. 64

them. Laing, 'Quite out of the blue, delivered a full blow to Aaron [Esterton's] jaw.'²⁶ It seems that what was modelled as an idealistic place in which power barriers, the differential between mad or sane collapsed, the modes of recovery from mental distress expanded, eventually fell victim to an new regime of authority, replicating the 'Sanism' of mainstream psychiatry with Laing's particular notions of how to be correctly 'mad', or how to allow others to be so. Those suffering or thinking in ways that did not fit this vision still suffered violent oppression and a denial of their own voice...

...soon after the period of Kingsley Hall, another radical movement which challenged the core principles of Psychiatry, and recognised its nature as in part an instrument of repression and control, was occurring in Germany. In the University of Heidelberg, initially influenced (some would say led) by the doctor/collaborator Dr Thomas Huber, a collectively organising group emerged called the Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv (SPK) emerged. Rather than focusing on the dynamics within family systems, and on the experience of madness as breakthrough or spiritual emergence as Laing and other's and Kingsley Hall did, the SPK focused on the material conditions of the 'sick' population, and applying marxist ideas and influenced by others on the radical left, engaged in direct action and mutual aid under an analysis summarised in their manifesto title '*Aus Der Krankheit Ein Waffe Machen*, often translated as [...] 'turn illness into a weapon.'²⁷...

...Like 'the brothers' of the Philadelphia Association, the SPK foregrounded a break down of the barrier between professional and patient, but this time from a dialectical materialist viewpoint aimed at challenging the dominant capitalist political system:

²⁶ Adrian Laing, *R. D. Laing: A Life* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006) p. 117

²⁷ Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 128

‘Capitalism [...]requires the continual destruction of the means by which we can build solidarity between doctors and patients, intentionally partitioning doctors and patients into different classes. To unite the doctor and the patient in a true dialectical relationship of collaboration is to declare revolt against the capitalist political economy of health.’²⁸ Accounts of the period are incredibly divided on how successfully the SPK achieved these aims, complicated by the fact that the SPK became associated with other groups, notably the Red Army Faction (sometimes referred to as the Baader-Meinhof group) who committed terrorist acts or violent direct actions, depending on the commentator, in pursuit of a political revolution that overthrew the West German capitalist consensus that followed the Marshall Plan in the lieu of the Second World War. For some, such as Felix Guattari, the group had succeeded where other anti-psychiatric experiments had failed, because they had ‘rallied forces for a real fight’ in their commitment to direct action²⁹. For more critical commentators, the call to ‘turn illness into a weapon’ was an ethical failure on the behalf of Huber, who was seen as trying to ‘exercise a revolution “on the back” of patients’ by Tellenbach. In a further criticism, Tellenbach suggests if “the only way to cure them is to foment a Marxist revolution,”[...] Huber was selling a cure that would never materialise.’³⁰ Pross also claims that the SPK was not in reality a self directed group but ‘an abuse of patients who were manipulated into doing Huber’s bidding.’³¹...

...For the authors of *Health Communism*, who claim their book contains the most comprehensive account of the SPK in the English language, all the negative criticism,

²⁸ Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 129

²⁹ François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (New York: CUP, 2010) p. 332-4

³⁰ Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 161

³¹ Ibid. p. 162

which was followed by often brutal and repressive state crackdowns and ultimately imprisonment of Huber as a terrorist agitator, was a mark of the SPK's success. For them, 'whether accusations of terrorism are true or not is immaterial to our account.' They state that, whether the SPK was engaged in 'violent revolutionary activity' or just in 'socially disruptive, emancipatory communal therapy', the very fact they were cracked down on so heavily by the state shows that the SPK demonstrated to the state the 'threat posed by a *sick proletariat*' and that in weaponising such a threat, the SPK had succeeded in demonstrating its power.³² ...

...However, the fact remains that those involved, whether doctors/patients/allies, did not achieve liberation for Mad people in the long term, and in fact involvement with the SPK led to increased repression for many, even if it could be argued that this oppression was a symptom of the challenge the SPK, alongside wider left radicalism, posed to the established order. As with accounts of other anti-psychiatric experiments, ultimately the history of the SPK is being argued over primarily by academics, people working within the psy-disciplines and social commentators. The mad experiences of those involved, depending on who is doing the commenting, either way are to an extent pathologised by sympathetic and critical parties – on the one hand as sick signifiers of capitalism's cold mechanics of being surplus to productivity, on the other using mainstream psychiatric assumptions to undermine any legitimacy to their participation in a revolutionary movement, and thus the legitimacy of the movement itself. While sympathetic to the political aims of the SPK on a personal level, and grateful to the way in which they highlight mainstream psychiatry's hegemony of oppression, the fact is that, by creating materialist manifestos and uniting behind specific aims and ideas of

³² Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 167

what madness and illness meant, they created an new ideology that had little room for the pluralism of understanding, and the foregrounding of Mad knowledge, that Mad Studies calls for. There is also no clear place for the contrary and creative aspects so intrinsic to most first person account sof madness. A lack of pluralism and of radical doubt is what makes possible the ‘corporeal warfare’ of the SPK’s direct action, and regardless of whether the ideology was indeed Huber’s or one owned collectively by the group, it did state in a concrete way what madness meant, excluding again those whose understandings might differ. Though Guattari suggested that they had ‘created a way out of ideology’, the SPK’s own manifesto is based on an understanding that their way was the only way: ‘the only capacity for true revolutionary interaction of anti-psychiatry lies in the praxis of the SPK’³³³⁴ The continual revolution of contraries, rather than negations, which I suggest is an overarching (non)mechanism of mad thought, is closed off, sane(e)itsised into a prosaic ideology that limits its power...

... It is for these reasons that I will not focus on the work of the various strands of ‘anti-psychiatry’ in this thesis – they still subjugate the voices of the mad to fit their own versions of ideology or spirituality. The concept of epistemic and especially hermeneutical injustice, introduced, though not in relation to mad people, by Miranda Fricker, is important here. Mad people have a long history of being silenced or denied a voice, often under the guise of sympathy, sometimes with a genuine if misplaced desire to give voice to those who are felt to have none. Yet unless that is changed by way of letting mad voices be heard as equals in the formation of knowledge production about

³³ Beatrice Adler-Bolton and Artie Verkant, *Health Communism* (New York: Verso, 2022) p. 168

³⁴ Ibid p. 153

mad experience, and the knowledge that might come from madness, then justice is denied to mad people. Fricker describes hermeneutical injustice as ‘occurring when prejudice denies a social group the opportunity to contribute to the pool of knowledge that allows human beings to make sense of and explain their experiences to themselves and others’³⁵. Psy disciplines not only take ownership of the tools by which madness is understood in wider society, within the law, schools, prisons, media. They also explicitly deny mad people access to these tools as they have baked into them a fundamental notion that mad people are powerless to understand their madness, and a notion that those people’s madness is meaningless. Wilda L. White suggests that for mad liberation to take place epistemic justice must be achieved far beyond the confines of the mental health system – mad liberation involves re-writing the entire ‘Master Narrative’ of society – ‘We must strive to create theories, concepts, meanings, interpretations, beliefs and knowledge that combine our lived experience with thought, reason, and creativity’.³⁶ Rather than challenging the psychiatric and societal mainstream by allowing new narratives about the meaning of Mad experience to become dominant, as the Philadelphia Association and the SPK aimed for, true mad movements, in consistently challenging all forms of Master Narrative, can destabilize such oppressive structures. Blake’s later work gives a blueprint of how madness – when written without submission to sanity in its public presentation – can do this. My aim is to let my own selves and their madness’s interact with Blake with a similar unwillingness to cede to sane modes of representing thought, so as to give voice, give justice, to the polyphony of madness in all its power, insightfulness and chaos...

³⁵ Wilda L. White ‘Re-writing the Master Narrative’ *The Routledge International Handbook of Mad Studies* ed. Peter Beresford and Jasna Russo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022) p. 77

³⁶ Ibid p. 87

...Society is captivated by the notion of 'the fine line between madness and genius', and yet who judges what side of this metaphorical divide a piece of thinking lies on?

Ultimately, society still evaluates this from a 'sane' perspective; if we can't understand something, it is non-sense, mad, worthless. Karl Jaspers famously stated a true delusion was one that's characteristic was 'un-understandability'³⁷, but who gets to decide on whether the belief has meaning or not? Very often it is not the person deemed mad or identifying their experience as mad. An exception seems to be made if its attributable to some theory of madness or 'mad play' coined by a thinker who has perhaps dipped their toes into madness, but has ultimately been judged – through judicious explanation of their thinking process, by their distancing of their own experience along prescribed and academic lines until its acceptable, or just through the privilege invested in them by society – to be sane. I find much of interest in writers such as Derrida, and especially in Deleuze and Guattari, but again, when they talk of 'schizo-analysis' and of 'the schizophrenic', it is of some state of mind or person who is fascinating for their distance from humanity, as an *organ-machine*, a conduit through which history and politics are expressed, and the experience of the people they speak for is never received unfettered by their interpretation – and that of other academic and medical professionals – in their work³⁸. Though they are sympathetic to the 'schizophrenic experience' – and suggest ways in which it is a meaningful one – as a Mad person I find the anthropological slant of their writing troubling and at points quite hurtful. Who are academic philosophers or

³⁷ Karl Jaspers. *General Psychopathology* trans. J. Hoenig and Marion W. Hamilton (New York: John Hopkins University Press, 1997)

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, 'Schizophrenia and Society' in *Two Regimes of Madness* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007) pp. 17-28

psychologists, however sympathetic, to decide whether our Mad experience is the ultimate expression of ‘transcendental empiricism?’ Would we allow someone male to be the ultimate authority on how meaningful a female author’s representation of her experience is? Would we support the white American professor who judged the work of Nigerian novelist Chimimanda Ngozie Adichie ‘not authentically African’?³⁹ In most fields of academic study it is no longer acceptable to position your subject as a passive object of study, but when discussing Madness we are still scared to give the Mad themselves a voice, or when we do, we treat it with medically ratified suspicion, a form of sanctioned stigmatization that people working in the field of Mad Studies have argued should be labelled ‘Sanism’ or ‘mentalism’. This is defined as ‘the systematic subjugation of people who have received mental health diagnosis and treatment’ and extends to invalidating or ignoring and knowledge that might be gained from the mental experiences that might have led to such treatment⁴⁰. This ‘Sanism’ is not only perpetuated through poor media representation of Madness, whether in films, books or on the news, but is also actually increased by ‘anti-stigma’ campaigns in many western countries that focus on Madness as ‘as illness like any other’ and therefore perpetuate the assumption among the general public that the Mad person is indeed pathologically different and unwell, and should be treated differently from other humans, even if it moves that different treatment, at least ostensibly, towards a sympathetic rather than suspicious or fearful response. In reality, research has shown that anti-stigma campaigns focusing on biogenetic causal beliefs around ‘mental illness’ only increase

³⁹ Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, *The Danger of A Single Story* < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg> > [accessed 13th November 2018]

⁴⁰ *Mad Matters* ed. Brenda LeFrancois, Robert Menzies and Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013) p. 339

feelings of difference, furthering the ‘us and them’ dynamic between the ‘Mad’ and the ‘Sane’ that Goffman was pointing out as a damaging relation as early as the 1950’s⁴¹⁴²...

... There is increasingly an acknowledgment then - even within some medical circles - that we need a move towards a hermeneutic understanding of madness, but the prosaic way in which psychological narrative is captured often fails to capture the reality of mad experience due to the fact it is preoccupied with sense making, with writing madness for the sane.⁴³ Mad Studies demands that Mad people be involved in shaping societies laws, attitudes and philosophy on madness, and, in a similar vein, I believe a Mad Criticism is required in literary studies, adopting the general perspective of Mad Studies which – instead of ‘psychiatry’, which has ‘always seemed to narrow understanding’ – ‘excites through the breadth and focus of its discussion’ as an alternative to the ‘psychiatric reductionism’.⁴⁴ It should align itself with objectives set out by Mad people working in academia, such as to ‘recognize the lived experience of madness as a fundamental form of human knowledge’.⁴⁵ Mad critics should respond to texts with their own lived experience of madness itself, to seek out and celebrate expressions of states which are recognised as similar – though not the same – as those experienced by a huge and largely silenced Mad minority, who for good reason are

⁴¹ Patrick W. Corrigan *The Stigma Effect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) p. xv

⁴² Matthias C. Angermeyer et al, ‘Biogenetic explanations and public acceptance of mental illness: systematic review of population studies’ in *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2011) 199, p. 367-372. p. 371

⁴³ Bracken, Pat. ‘Towards a Hermeneutic Shift in Psychiatry’ *World Psychiatry*, October 2014, Vol.13(3), pp.241-243

⁴⁴ *Mad Matters* ed. Brenda LeFrancois, Robert Menzies and Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013) pp. xi-xii

⁴⁵ *Mad Matters* ed. Brenda LeFrancois, Robert Menzies and Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013) p. 188

often fearful of expressing and communicating their madness externally due to the stigma and state apparatus that suppress or humour it...

... Literary Criticism often seeks to find reason of some level in difficult texts in order to rescue the author from the charge of madness, or acknowledges that madness plays a part but speaks as if the meaning was made despite the madness, rather than because of it. This charge is often reversed in the testimony of Mad people themselves, such as Mary O'Hagan in her powerful short film *Madness Made Me* in which she says 'I made meaning, not in spite of my madness, but because of it'.⁴⁶ This has occurred particularly prevalently in the field of Blake Studies, in which figures such as Yeats, Northrop Frye and Leo Damrosch have gone to great lengths of spectacular mental gymnastics to 'un-mad' Blake, and others have diminished the parts of the work they struggle with as mad in a negative sense – or pathological, and thus as signifying either artistic failures or positioning the work as an elaborate coping strategy. Youngquist states that this 'aberration in the mind's life [...] challenges our common humanity'⁴⁷, while Britton suggests Blake's work constitutes 'the elaboration of a massive psychic defense system designed to prevent the self from being menaced by the "difference" of the outside world'.⁴⁸ This implicit 'sanism' in criticism also leads to a sense that certain writers, such as Blake, are difficult. I believe this is because we as a society and culture fearful of accepting madness on its own terms and feel the need to control understandings of it by a process of theoretical codification, naming it or breaking it down according to philosophical, theoretical, psychological or psychiatric method. The Madder the writing, the more complex the model, diagnosis or formulation we need to employ,

⁴⁶ Mary O'Hagan, *Madness Made Me* < <https://vimeo.com/132294911> > [accessed 20th November 2018]

⁴⁷ Paul Youngquist, *Madness and Blake's Myth* (London: Penn State University Press, 1989) p. 3

⁴⁸ *William Blake Studies* ed. Nicholas M. Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) pp. 182-183

until, to me as a Mad reader, the criticism along these lines is often only transferring its fear about its method's limitations onto its failures to adequately explain what's going on in the text, or in the writer. You can often understand more about the insecurities of these modes of enquiry through reading such responses to Mad writing than you can derive any understanding of the lived experience of madness...

... I want to investigate whether such mad texts actually are difficult or whether it's more the case that they are difficult to interpret using the tautological frameworks of interpretation we adopt from the 'psy' disciplines and from theory – frameworks which they evade. Why is it that poets such as Blake have a large following among Mad communities? Perhaps it's because he very effectively and accurately speaks to madness, that to properly understand Blake is either to be mad or to be driven so by the work, and that to remain sane while reading is to never experience the texts as Blake intended them to be received. Their purpose was to re-organise our consciousness away from 'the sleep of reason' and towards something ebullient and excessive, in an ever-evolving state of contrary turmoil; something which psychiatry would fearfully label as pathological. David Fuller is a contemporary Blake critic who perhaps gets close to understanding this in his 2005 essay 'Madness as a Refuge From Unbelief: Blake and the Sanity of Dissidence', in which he writes 'what is true for the writer is also true for the reader: it is impossible to *hear* a great or noble thing unless the spirit is moved. The reader as well as the poet needs to be in some sense "mad"'⁴⁹...

⁴⁹ David Fuller. 'Mad as a refuge from unbelief : Blake and the sanity of dissidence.', in *Madness and creativity in literature and culture*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,2005) pp. 121-143.

...This new Mad criticism must break some of the conventions of the academy by necessity... those effects valued by the academy – the strong argument, the confident conclusion – are all tools that enshrine reason, reductionism and the capture of a moment isolated from its infinite context – Derrida’s ‘wellspring of sense’ – as the bedrock of critical writing.⁵⁰ A Mad critique must also by necessity critique the way critical writing style serves a certain way of conceiving of knowledge, must make bare its emotionality, its subjectivity and its transience; it must embrace and represent the contrariness and the fluctuations of mad experience. In addition, and as Audrey Lorde so eloquently put it with relation to struggles for voice in relation to feminism, racial and queer liberation, ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’.⁵¹ Mad criticism must discard divisive and damaging terms which literary criticism has adopted too unquestioningly from the ‘psy’ disciplines, and thus reclaim the right of people’s Madness to express itself unfettered, as I suggest Blake’s did in his work. Madness’s inability to be pinned down, its evasion even of its own definitions as they come into being, is characterized in Blake’s work, and makes even the systems it necessarily creates for itself transient and un-transferable, perhaps making of the fallen world, which Blake suggests we can’t fully escape, a *Diagrammaticism* – as Guattari might put it in one of his more useful formulations on the radical potential in such thinking, ‘Systems of potentialities, rather than stratified systems’⁵². A series of texts and artworks that force new modes of thought, new lines of flight, makes breakthroughs of our breakdowns and always challenges accepted modalities of thinking about politics, art, theology, sexuality, selfhood...life in all its fullness and fractures. A series of Blake’s

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) p. 62

⁵¹ Audrey Lorde. *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House* https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf [accessed 15th November 2018]

⁵² Félix Guattari, *Lines of Flight* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) p. 40

who wrote and come into being for each reader as the text acts upon them. If we can celebrate the Madness of those whose writing speaks to our own, and share their terror, joy and pain – share their vision – then so many of us will feel less alone and may learn, in time, to speak and write ourselves freer of psychiatry's, society's and, because we are to some extent of them, our own selves' 'mind forg'd manacles'. And society, if its embedded 'sanism' diminishes, may come – via attentiveness to the messages in people's madness, by welcoming mad thought into our collective knowledge production rather than creating systems to denigrate its worth – to break some its own chains too ...

II.



...One way in which the baggage of a history of interpretations can – at least in part – be lost, seems to be in cultivating an attitude towards close reading a text in which the personal reflections and resonances springing from the process are given primacy, putting something like auto-ethnography at the heart of the process of reading Blake's madness madly. I was already encountering Blake like this as a matter of mad practice, an almost ritualistic return to the objects of Blake's plates as a way to not only reflect on them, but on the differing selves that made those encounters, and the way that the plates acted on them, and then the selves on each other. However, I also found precedent for creating something artistic and critical at once from these encounters in the way that T. J. Clark returns over and over to Poussin paintings in *The Sight of Death*, the whole of his being-in-the-world and the world-his-being-makes ending up refracted through the lenses of this process. As an experiment, I decided to spend a period soaking up plate 46 of Songs of Innocence and Experience – London – over a series of encounters, seeing what links would flow forth from my previous meetings with the poem, my memories of 'innocence and experience' and the presence of the (facsimile) plate as object sat in front of me, not only as a vessel to sail into the past on, but also one which can bear new mad experiences, as Blake's writing often does...

...The first thing that strikes me about the plate is the illustration at the top. In comparison to some of the other plates in the series, there is a firm division between sections – marked by the strong line that seems to be the floor beneath the elderly man and the child, and the pale blues and straws of the section below on which the title is written. I feel – perhaps because of the colours, perhaps the cloud like patterning on the

right of the page – that this area around the title is almost like a sky beneath the feet of the two figures, suggesting to me a hypogeal or at least ulterior world existing simultaneously with that one in which they walk...

...What is happening in this section with the figures feels profoundly to do with light: the child is leading the elderly figure (by the beard?) from the dim left hand of the image into the beam of light that strafes the otherwise dark wall behind them. A simple interpretation would centre upon classical/biblical tropes of light and darkness as good and evil, of the child leading the figure of the adult into the light, and those notions, I think, are undoubtedly something Blake is drawing upon in the image. Yet I notice there is something terrifying happening in this light beam. The older man, turned away from whatever the source of the light beam is, has a degree of detail in his expression, brows and cheekbone evident by the shadows they cast, a hint of what I take to be a kind smile (but why?) on the part of his lips visible above his beard. He is defined in the interplay of the darkness and light across his expression. Yet the child's face, flooded by the light source, is nothing but a spectral outline and a dark blob of an eye...

...What does this say about innocence or light? Maybe that it is a state where self is weak, or non-existent, where the scoring of persona into the person by forces of experience has not taken place. Or perhaps, since this child is, seemingly, leading the older man forwards through but away from the source of the light, this self-erasure comes from his turning back, like Lot's wife looking back towards Sodom. It's while looking closely at this child figure that I notice its right hand. At first, I thought it was reached out as it is simply because of an aesthetic neatness, mirroring, when taken in with the other arm reaching up into the older man's beard, the diagonal made by the

beam of light itself. But that in itself sparks another look at that light beam, and I realise it ends with what looks like a door frame. Why doesn't it pass this point? It defies the way that light as a physical property should work. It also makes me realise that this door is something more than embellishment or background setting, and that, far from simply being held out in an elegant pose, the child's left hand is reaching to touch or open this door, this door which stops or swallows all the light...

...Or, having had a break for coffee and looking more closely again, the image seems to suggest that this door leads into the ulterior world in which the poem is printed. Having initially noticed the strong division between the upper and lower sections of the plate, I am now struck by how powerfully the beam of light ties the two together, as the line that is the left side of the beam in the top section becomes a boundary that crosses between the cold blues and yellows of the bottom section, a sunbeam through what I earlier described as the sky of the ulterior world. I start to see other (fearful) symmetries between the two sections and as I do, also notice that the child, but not the older figure, casts a long shadow. This troubles me deeply, I feel it in my belly, but I can't fathom exactly why...

...I return to the plate after collecting a parcel (a printer cartridge, which seemed also a lens by which the poem interfered with my day...). I walked the mile there and back on foot, bumping into two people as the shadow the child cast obscured my vision and I stumbled along the pavement. Queuing in the sorting office, I couldn't get rid of the gut ache it caused, and the image also of that face melting away under the radiance of the light source, leaving only its eyes (or their sockets). I'm reminded of visions of nuclear devastation I had while in a psychiatric hospital, in which cruel intensities of heat and

light erased the faces of those dearest to me, and realise Blake's 'London', in a sense, was addressing the start of societal trends that would lead to nuclear armament down the line – the conjunction of dogma, state, and nationalism with the dawn of science and industrialised warfare, even in Blake's time playing out in Europe wide warfare the likes of which had no precedent in the living memory of its people...

...I notice that now I am looking at that shadow from the eyes of the older figure, seeing that child's face as an aporia in an otherwise three-dimensional image, a face shaped framing of a flaming light – like film burn at the end of a roll of stills. I start to think this pair of figures are also one, like in memories when two selves co-exist uneasily with one another. I contemplate this idea of the child as innocent and childhood as the state of innocence, and inevitably try to remember that state in myself. Yet as I scan back through my memories, flooded by scents of pollens and farms as I leave the city for the Yorkshire Dales, the images of before I first _____ burn until unrecognisable. I can't work out whether this is a loss or a protective mechanism. I feel 80 years old, like the grandfather figure in the painting (I have decided now that he must be a grandfather) and feel my memories pulling me back with the stomach churn of vertigo, the tug at the chin. But the face I look to - to lead me towards them - is always burning away...

...'London' has no corresponding poem in *Songs of Innocence*, one of only a few poems in the two collections where this is the case. What relevance, I wonder, does this have to the child's erased face? Are children born experienced or robbed of innocence so early in the world of 'London' that a constitution of innocence is impossible? Is that why the child's face is undefinable? I think of the infant's tear in the last stanza of the poem, blasted by whatever the harlot's curse is, is there something here about

intergenerational trauma in industrialised society? Epigenetics? Post-Memory? Are the mind's manacles hereditary (like the postulated psychotic 'disorders' which have become so set in the concrete of language we forget they are merely descriptions, not explanations...)? I am starting, I realise, to look at the words, so I should really turn to the poem, albeit with that molten non-face inevitably hanging over the encounter...

...So to the text, and I can't help at this point reflect on my first encounter with this poem. It was also, after 'The Tyger' in a book of children's verse from which my parents read to me, the first encounter I'd had with Blake, at least as a (at the time nascent) critical reader. I was at school studying for GCSE's, not particularly hard working, and more interested in a strange pursuit of religion or perhaps spirituality. I would sit staring long into the screen of a candle flame's flickers on my bedroom wall, trying to suss out some kind of meaning, or just dying temporarily inside the dancing light, drifting away into other things. And yet something about this poem, first heard as another pupil read it out to the class from an anthology, made my mind stand to attention. I realise now this had a lot to do with mishearing and thus my very first encounter was already somehow askew...

...as someone who lived largely and willingly in a dreamlike state (not much has changed perhaps), I instantly took the first 'wander'd' to be 'wondered'. Therefore, I begun by thinking of someone purposefully thinking about something, and thinking through the medium of something else I got wrong (this might be the fault of the boy reading the poem out...) – I took 'charter'd' to be 'charted' and thus something to do with maps, rather than what I now know to be related to either something 'founded,

privileged or protected by charter' or as something privileged or licensed⁵³. This had no doubt got something to do with the fact that I had (and still have) a bit of an obsession with maps, using them as prompts to plot and take imaginary journeys through landscapes the cartography suggested. As well, it may have been because my knowledge of the Thames at the time was more topographical than experiential, having poured over maps more than I had visited London, and the idea of the Thames being charted thus made sense. Yet I also thought of something being charted as in understood, or well explored, and took the practice wondering by means of these charts as a way of making them new, as I was used to doing in my own mental life at the time. I was always reinventing the world and my spiritual beliefs in order to escape difficult encounters, bullying, fears, ideas and, perhaps, what I took to be the impending assuredness of adulthood...

... so these first understandings of the first stanza were all informed by mis-readings, and yet such readings still inevitable bear on my readings of the poem in the present day; I explore the relationships between these mis-readings and the way I look at the poem now. Let's start with the wander / wonder. To wonder is to purposefully contemplate what something might mean born from 'the desire to know something' but also in some sense to doubt. To wander is to amble aimlessly and without direction, or perhaps, if it's applied to the operations of the mind, to think without structure or path. Perhaps Blake, or the voice of this poem, was in some sense taking what would later be defined as a 'dérive'. Perhaps wandering is a form of liminal madness from which other 'truths' can emerge to topple the industrialised and dark London the poem portrays.

⁵³ *OED Online* < <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30820?rskey=JtLgKs&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> > [accessed 28th January 2019]

Perhaps purposefully (and the tone of the poem is purposeful...the rhythm forceful, the form tight...) being directionless is a state the poem is drawing value from, an exoneration of a state of aimlessness as the antidote to industrialisation. I realise that actually my sideways look at the world, even as a 15-year-old, was perhaps constituted of wondering as wandering or wandering as wondering. Similarly, though my notion of charted was again misheard 'charter'd', the activities now seem to converge and resonate together within my mind. Are charters in some way a mapping procedure of industry and law, defining what is and isn't legitimate, and therefore what is legitimately real in the industrialised society...

...on the idea of 'marking', my younger self had no such penetrating insights. I think I just read 'mark' as 'saw' or 'see'. I probably even embarrassingly used it wrongly based on this misunderstanding in essays, something I was in the habit of doing with new vocabulary I (thought) I'd picked up at the time. It was only later on in life that I saw the 'marks' in the faces the poem encounters as being something that the voice of the poem is active in making – it is a projection of weakness and woe onto the faces as much as it is a recognition of something innate. This notion of projection feels laden with significance in relation to madness, for to be declared mad itself is often the work of some other projecting the quality of madness onto you at least as much as them recognising something within you. Many readings of Blake, which I'll look at later on, note his perceptiveness around areas of psychic relations that had not yet been defined or named - areas such as what Freud later coined 'projection' and 'transference'...

...Moving onto the second stanza, and the mental chains – the 'mind forg'd manacles' – has always been an image that has stuck with me since that first encounter. I was taught

what to think of them almost immediately by my teacher; he saw them as signifying the deeply embedded sense of class or almost a caste style acceptance of place by citizens of London, and the unchanging role those people played in society. Although contained within the mind, this always suggested a visual image of people's minds being bound somehow. And yet what the teacher, and indeed me myself, never paid attention to was the fact that the voice of the poem doesn't see these manacles: it hears them. How do you hear a manacle? How does the aural bind you, being you? Maybe it has something to do with the naming or utterance that closes off other worlds of possibilities, bans difference, forces one into position. This, for someone with experiences like my own, will always lead to thoughts of psychiatric labels, those tools of the 'shrink' which do just that – shrinking human experience in order to subjectify and quantify, to bind our emotional response to suffering within a static framework, divorced from time...

...yet the voice of the poem is the one who is hearing the mind forg'd manacles, not those whose cries and bans he hears them in. Again, like the marking earlier in the poem, it is something to do with the forces that guide the perception of the poems voice, rather than something innate. Is this poetic voice, I wander / wonder, playing the role of the shrink, flitting up to some panoptical viewpoint to look down and cast the lives of others into his poem and vision? Or is this recognition of the manacles the first step to liberation from the system that binds minds with them? Is this a position of hopelessness or hope, or can it be both – sometimes it feels like it – [new sentence] is the poetic voice an alternative diagnostician? And is this why my former diagnostician felt threatened by my poetry, as I found later in notes in which they were used as evidence of disordered thinking, of psychopathology? Did my engagement with the world and my making of meaning of it through madness – a whorl of sometimes confusing

symbols, visions of light dark characters who reflected the best and worst of humankind, sometimes apocalyptic and sometimes happy about that, unsettled her to the point it was easier to box them off as meaningless symptoms rather than dwell on what messages they might hold, not just for me, but for her, or for humankind in general...

...or, back at the poem, is the colon where we should be laying our attention? 'in every voice: in every ban'. Does this colon make a clearer causal link between voice and ban than we understand? Is it that, just by voicing a statement, we restrict the potential for other statements or modes or thought? Is every time we speak itself an injury to freedom on a micro level? Maybe I am reading too much into this, but I think that Blake would want this to be the way we read him...at least the Mad Blake I make would. Thinking about the illuminations again briefly, I think about how important to Blake the method of his production was, the infidelity and differences in every version. The one I use above – the 1826 Library of Congress Copy Z – sparks the interpretations I make here. Others are coloured differently, and take our journeys in conflicting directions, or perhaps contrary is the better word. What I mean is that Blake *wants* us to be doing this, this wormhole of thinking, reflecting; this living out of the poem's madness. Otherwise he is the one with the keys to the mental chains; he wants the keys to be ours, or at least to share them with us or to teach us how to make our own; he is not a jailor, though thinking this way always carries the risk of jailing yourself...

...there is a firm line drawn beneath the second and third stanzas on the plate, and, with no clear purpose in relation to the images and illuminations, I think it must be seen as part of the poem, despite the lack of indication in most typeset versions of the text. I

wonder what the significance of it is, this cleaving flourish that chops the poem in two after the manacles are heard. Is it a limit of said manacles, a bounding line? Does it correspond in some way to the other clear divisive feature of the plate, the line beneath the floor of the child and the old man's street in the sky? Or is there rather a link between its trembling nature, the firmness of the line under the title, and the sine wave of the line beneath the poem's end? Not serving any real illustrative purpose, I wonder / wander whether the lines represent some kind of metamorphosis of the mental state of the poem. From one of the firm certainties of place and its naming (something that Blake comes back to often, most notably in the lists of places names mapping out the London of Jerusalem), from the stability of selfhood or self / other divisions, via this middle line, starting to flex, a threshold where solidity wavers, through to the pulsating vibration and interchange between contraries that the bottom line now suggests to me...

...Or, looking again later, is it just that the sine wave is a root structure for what could be a tree down the left-hand margin, its waviness organic by comparison to the confident underline underpinning the city like the bounding wall in the illustration above...

...beneath this dividing line, the poem takes a turn away from a situation where the voice of the poem is overtly constructing the reality of the poem, to one in which the vision has taken full control and I, for a stanza, fades into the background. A 'chimney sweepers cry ...appals' the blackening walls of the church. A soldier's sigh is transfigured into blood flowing down the wall of a palace. The poem moved me so deeply here because it makes the cost of industrialised society clear with metaphors that

also have a physical truth. The church's walls blackening reminds me of the churches of my Sheffield childhood, many of which had not yet been sandblasted clean of the residue of industry's sooty blanket: the sootiness of industry also being the physical environment of work that made sick and ultimately killed the chimney sweeps of London, often before they reached adulthood. But the fact that the church was impotent, or at least actively ignored or collaborated with industrialists in the development of a society in which such poverty could exist alongside its own wealth and power, and serving its growth, also appalled and blackened the institution metaphorically too. Similarly, the cost of the imperialism and expansionism of the country at the time was very much blood, of soldiers let alone their adversaries or victims at home and abroad. Yet there is also a potent metaphorical aspect to the image of the sigh transfigured into blood, part of this potency deriving perhaps born from the reality of the human cost of the city, of nationhood and identity; self, state and religious...

...in the last stanza the "I" returns to stress the voice of the poem's most damning impressions of the city it marks out. The way the "hear" at the end of the line is intersected by the dividing line between blue and yellow in the background in an almost identical manner to the "hear" at the end of the "mind forged manacles" line makes me think the hearing here is meant to be a continuation of that mental binding. I remember not thinking much of this stanza when a young man, trained in the misogynistic and judgemental environment of the schoolyard, classroom and church, the very institutions Blake is railing against – albeit two hundred years later. I saw "harlot" as simply a deserving insult, almost a true statement about a person in the sex trade, who had to be morally corrupt or evil in some way. It shames me to say so, but I

thought of her as nothing but a vile person, shouting swearwords at her poor child for crying at the cruelty of the situation that life is. And maybe the poem's voice feels similar but, without wanting to defend Blake against quite legitimate accusations of misogyny in his overall canon, I feel like something different is going on here. As a Mad person, defined as insane or deviant by the diagnosticians and society as a result, I often felt – and still feel – cursed: cursed by my position in society and cursed internally by seeing myself through society's lens. Nowadays, when I read the curse here in the poem, I see both a curse-as-swearword and curse as something a person carries with them – burdensome – inflicted on them by their situation and by the labelling of their response to it. And, having seen how society neglects to help those subjected to abuse, I know too well – to my shame because I have done it – how being hurt leads to you being more likely to inflict hurt on others. This cycle of abuse, of financial and emotional poverty, which industrial societies almost cultivate as a by-product and can't seem to exist without, is the curse blighting both the infant and the harlot, and the institution of marriage, with the way it propagates misogyny and the strange fascism of the family, is a hearse...trapping people by bonds mental and legal into systems that enslave them into the service of the state and capital just as the family, to protect itself from falling, must submit to such systems to survive, perform the familial rituals, put its own welfare above that of anyone outside it. At the same time, then (and now) infidelity was accepted and tolerated (for men). As Leo Damrosch puts it, the sex trade, "officially condemned but in practice condoned, grew up for dissatisfied men; women's needs were not considered"⁵⁴. For Blake any system in which you became ensnared was a form of death. The hearse of marriage was perhaps all too real, especially in a time

⁵⁴ Leo Damrosch. *Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) p. 91

when many such arrangements were still loveless and focused on retention of status and possessions, though the Blakes' doesn't seem to have been that way. In our Mad modern times, the family is still sanctified as the ultimate social unit, with government policies making it favourable financially to be in such a unit. Yet as many in the Mad community – sometimes by necessity, sometimes by choice – cannot live or do not want to live along such prescribed lines, the concept of the nuclear family forms another way in which they are cut adrift from the mainstream and treated as deviant, despite many within Mad and Queer communities making damning critiques of the damage family causes, and the way it limits the ability to organise in ways that might challenge dominant modalities of power. The trans musician and artist Terre Thaemlitz elucidates the fearful underbelly of our religious attachment to family and the traumas it sustains in their 'Deproduction project', and as I now consider London's final stanza it is the haunting condemnations of their writings that ring loudest in my mind when I scan the words 'marriage hearse'⁵⁵. The incestuous undercurrent they highlight also starts white noise and ringing in my ears and a lifting of my consciousness out of my body, a retreat from its now symbolic site of pain, despite the replacement of each and every cell by now that experienced the _____ ...

...I've gotten to a point where I am perhaps as much talking about my own experiences and views than I am the poem, letting the close reading morph into some essentialising analyses of today's society. But then Blake often leads me towards this kind of thinking.

⁵⁵ Terre Thaemlitz *Deproduction* http://www.comatonse.com/writings/2017_deproduction.html#essay1 [accessed 26th November 2018]

It is as if he gives license through his writing to let madness run away with you, to see things from multiple viewpoints, from panoptical and introverted and dialogical and social angles, all at once. This excess, this overwhelming sensation and expansion of thought, is homely to me these days, as a Mad person, though that is not to say easy. And yet it used to terrify me when it first started to overrun my preconceptions of what life as a self in the world should be. Something about finding the same or similar sensation communicated so well in Blake's writings de-stigmatised myself(ves) to myself and my relation to others. In his writing I found a set of voices which seemed to make sense of madness without making it sensible, that communicated the way in which madness is felt in the body and reaches out through the mind to the world, as the world reaches back. I realise this version of Blake as belonging to me, and to the Mad, is down to the way in which I read Blake. But then isn't the way we read experience a large part of Blake's writing itself. How the poet 'marks in every face' according to his own state of mind, how the voices of his poetry map out different ways of seeing that make clear that such ways are polyphonous, and yet each voice still speaks with authority, even when doubting. These contradictions become contraries and the spaces Blake defines poetically envelop them and are enveloped by them; subversive lenses to perceive injustices; authoritarian lenses which replace like with like and show the danger of convictions, much like Nietzsche's statement "Convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies". These are lenses of myth that control, lenses of creation which limit themselves in wounding ways. Illustrations with lines so confident they erase doubt and so lead you to doubting the authority of the lines (which themselves become wobbly, like at the aforementioned point in London)...

...I think of Blake's complete works, the Erdman version staring at me from the shelf, spine buckled and tatty from the weight of its impact on the last few years of my life. I think of how many pencilled remarks of my own marginalia contradict each other; so many moments of contrary insight to be comfortingly derived from such sacred yet all too human words. I have contributed mine to Blake's own marginalia, which is also published therein, and also speaks with the power of a subjective and immediate response, not one of the critic at once remove from the impact of what he is reading. I think of Iain Sinclair's lecture on "Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime" and how he refers to his copy of the complete works as "a personal I Ching, an almanac of divination." and of (his) Blake as someone/ thing he invokes – "I invoke Blake and step out into the world." For Sinclair, too, Blake's Madness is an essential feature of his writing and something which too confident an analysis negates. As he writes, "A lot of the more cultured, socially successful people of the era, the university poets, would have looked on Blake, if they were interested in him at all, as being one of the tribe of the mad"⁵⁶. The "necklace" of asylums which Sinclair traced around London demonstrated exactly what people did to the mad at the time: they pushed them to the edges. Perhaps they were far too eloquent as critics of society, as I see Blake, and as Laing sees the 'Schizophrenic', to be permitted a place at the heart of it. "Malignancies" to be removed to the fringes, as Sinclair puts it. But perhaps the problem is partly just that society places no value on Mad (non)sense making. When it causes a disturbance, the Mad person might be shipped off, like Blake down to Felpham, or myself on various occasions to a mental health respite centre, or, less pleasantly worded, an acute ward. They may even end up in prison, or worse, as almost happened to Blake in the episode

⁵⁶ Iain Sinclair. *Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2011)

he had with Scofield. But, for the most part, we focus on de-legitimatising their methods of communication or attempts to convey their experience, so as not to “corroborate” such delusions, so as to avoid the reality of their metaphors, or to resist their “reconfiguring of the topography”, as Sinclair would put it, of London, which for Blake symbolises the project of industrial society. For me this version of Blake is immensely attractive, this firebrand visionary revolutionary that Sinclair delineates in his lecture...but this vision of Blake doesn’t seem to accommodate sufficiently the suffering and confusion that exist alongside the prophetic insight in my Blake, in the way I read and empathise with his orchestra of poetic voices, as a Mad person. And I feel that Sinclair, for all his distaste for regulations, and despite the revolutionary fervour which he attributes to Blake as a spiritual guide, neglects or romanticises the Mad aspect of Blake I know and invoke, the Blake for whom, at points, despair is almost overwhelming, whose doubts can paralyse as well as catalyse ...

...If we are to discuss Blake’s being mad or otherwise, aren’t we just joining a history of people entertaining such judgements one way or another from his own era up to the present day? Yes and no. The challenge a Mad perspective brings to previous versions of Blake is one born of the experience both of what constitutes madness (which should surely at least in part be defined by those who’ve experienced it rather than outside observers), and of what it feels like to read Blake in relation to those experiences. Mad studies challenge the notion that there can be empirical method to defining madness – and yet this is something many critics of Blake have attempted to do in their work...

...One such writer is Paul Youngquist in his book *Madness and Blake's Myth*⁵⁷. His reintegration of Madness into a version of Blake is important, when the Blake the man who experienced and wrote from it had almost been faded into the background by Northrop Frye, Yeats and other critics' explications of the entire work as some kind of bold and contiguous system of meaning. But his methodology for deducing Blake's madness, though he tries to distance himself from the charge, is essentialising, based on what he calls "empirical observation of experience" which is exactly the kind of attitude by which psychiatry proceeds. He is anxious to avoid the language of psychoanalysis as he believes it becomes as much about the interpreter as the analysand, that its approach is "too literary to yield conclusive results"...but then proceeds with a system of interpretation which hides its biases behind a false objectivity, much the same as the one which Mad studies continuously challenges, as it challenges any approach that seeks to essentialise or generalise about human experience. It is exceedingly personal, to someone like myself, to see the biographical, poetic and personal set of writings and art which constitute today's Blake being pathologised in such a way. And ultimately, Youngquist, though acknowledging the part madness has to play in Blake's work, feels that it succeeds despite its madness rather than because of it: "Could it be that an artistic achievement as great as William Blake's was born in the collision between a sound mind and its pathology?"...

...Youngquist creates a false choice in the opening of his book, saying that the choice of how we define madness that we are faced with is one between "historical relativism" and "clinical determinism". Reducing such a diverse and broad set of experiences and

⁵⁷ Paul Youngquist. *Madness and Blake's Myth* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989)

interpretations of said experiences to this is faintly ridiculous, and also still falls short of an interpretation where the voices of those labelled or identifying as mad are given any attention. Youngquist realises that the division is too neat, but his third way, “a phenomenology of mental life” is restricted by his notion of a ‘sane’ common humanity to which madness poses a challenge. That madness changes the status quo cannot be doubted, but the way in which madness arises is seen as an ‘negation’⁵⁸ of what it is to be human to Youngquist, rather than something related to the idea of a sane reaction to insane circumstance, or to trauma and oppression. Youngquist introduces biography of Blake, but never draws the link between the way in which Blake’s visions interact with trauma. Whether its bullying encountered as Basire’s apprentice and his subsequent isolation, the loss of his brother and the related visions, his poverty, his mental and political exile, alongside myriad other factors that made up his life experience, Blake’s difficult life experiences seem to directly shape his visionary experience of the world. More importantly, Youngquist takes the seemingly popular view that Blake became ‘madder’, in a negative sense of the word, in the period after the Songs of Innocence and Experience, especially in the later phase in which he produced his longest prophetic works. There’s a whole lot of unravelling for me to do to explain why I think this position doesn’t match up with the themes Blake’s texts engage with, but for now let’s just say that to the modern person, or at least modern medicine, someone seemingly holding unshakeable belief in the power of their insight, someone like the voice of Blake in ‘London’, is judged far madder than someone who expresses open doubts about these powers or feels cut adrift from society for expressing them...

⁵⁸ Paul Youngquist. *Madness and Blake’s Myth* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989) p.xi

... To me the later writings of Blake don't reflect a descent into madness, but rather mark one of the most harrowing and yet beautiful accounts of what it feels like to be cut adrift because society labels you mad. The self-doubts and stigma that arise internally as you are taught by powerful processes to doubt your own experience and insights due to the way they digress from the social norm, perhaps because your experience differs from either the social norm, or just what is held up as such despite being a minority position, such as a white, male, western and middle class doctor. Mad studies relates the experience of oppression, trauma and the mad experience explicitly. It relates, through narratives of personal experience and through academic study, the way in which pathology is a way of hiding the significance the precipitating traumas and the meaning making functions of madness and its varied expressions, and the function of such experiences in providing new lenses with which to view the world which can be a valuable expansion of human knowledge if we are willing to meet their challenge. Mad studies also makes explicit the wounds inflicted by isolation, invalidation, and internalised self-doubt which become inevitable for those who express their madness publicly, at least in western societies where the pathological paradigm is the dominant mode of understanding such experiences...as I continue to explore Blake's work, I want this to be something we hold onto: how it might be the external relations that Blake has with society that leads the powerful and confident voice of 'London' to fragment into the myriad warring entities Blake uses to outline his worlds and his mental life in later texts. The distress and suffering that results from this isolation is all too familiar to many who have had and expressed publicly Mad experiences and thoughts; it is not a question of our psychopathology but of society's refusal to engage with our thought unless its converted/perverted into a Sane-itisied version. It is an opening of ourself/ves

out to the world which all too often receives no proper response and is instead met by fear, dismissal, ridicule, incarceration, or worse...

III.



...Our selves are dictated to by our memories, or if psychiatrised, by the imposition of others upon them. For many years my life(s) were sculpted primarily by the revisionist lenses of the ICD-10, refracted and turned into a specific kind of sign through lists of symptoms and characteristics. My brain flailed like a trapped animal against the cage, bound by chemical bonds, as if stopping the mental fight by containing it would provide an answer. Initially, reading it through the glass and then feeling my madness change through this lens diminished the fear and pain a mind aflame creates. However, the chemical manacles that resulted from diagnosis were even worse than those forged in the mind. They clamped the senses closed and tethered the imagination to a shrinking selfhood. The drugs cast long shadows into my future; as iatrogenic illness; as

addiction; as withdrawal syndromes. But also as modified, mollified memories of existential visions, adrift in the fog. They threw shadows over the past, which they were cast back across by others wearing professional titles, captains of trawlers circling my limbic ocean. Nets of symptoms created pockets of closure which I was lured towards by leading questions hung like bait. Their winch pulled me, writhing, out of the context that made me, replacing stories with signifiers reified into facts. Bipolar. Psychosis. Hallucination. Thought Disorder...

...So it was, and is, that there is still a young man pinned to an acute ward bed, weighed down by the sense that his self can't contain his experience and visions, and told that those visions and experiences, myths and religion and writing are aberrations of a brain diseased at the level of neurons and neuralgia. The giants and guardians of memory were whittled away - like my shrinking grey matter - by stasis and the pressure of neuroleptics⁵⁹. The self that remained was singular; dumb; alive only when surfing the waves of sensation brought on by sleep deprivation or by turning the body over to drownings in oceans of drugs and unwanted intercourse. These things eclipsed that sorry self but brought no inspiration, and, when the self checked back in, left a residue of something like sadness through the daze...

...Before this crushing subjectification, before the veil of Olanzapine and Zopiclone and Diazepam and Lithium under the harsh yet dim light of the dirty corridors, I lived among faith and giants, guardians and gods and voices that had no clear owners, afraid

⁵⁹ Chen et al, 'A real world observation of anti-psychotic effects of brain volumes and intrinsic brain activity in schizophrenia' *Frontiers In Neuroscience* < <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnins.2021.749316/full> > [accessed 31/03/2022]

of and yet embracing the waves of successive darkness and light. My self(ves) spun out into the world; the world spun out from their I/Eyes and fingertips electric with energy and sensation, compass unable to fix locations as if balanced on ore rich rocks. This place was also lonely, as my spiritual and poetic worlds were at this point closed to others, yet it was also a constant conversation or shouting of multiple perspectives and emotions at once, richer with meaning than any of my 'sane' moments, with more 'insight' than any of those could manage to contain; thoughts fractal outwards into the infinite, guardians and selves in a mental war for control of body and soul...

...What if I could send that memory of meanings a means to weather their stripping away by 'psy' interventions, a stripping that left them with only their frames? What if I underwrote the tale of the ICD-10 with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that saved or destroyed so positively a later version of myself? What are the rules that we set for rewriting memory according to texts of profound importance, and who determines the texts by which we have permission to do so? The doctors are free to recast our history using their manuals, often to our detriment, but also have power to declare the mind casting back the profound or prophetic manual as diseased for doing so, even if doing so saves one of us...

...I want to voice a different set of truths in parallel, to unchain that boy from the bed and the catatonic head. So I send Blake back through the limbic system like malware, to re-madden memories made stultified and stale by labels that robbed my multitudes of meaning in the name of containment and healing...

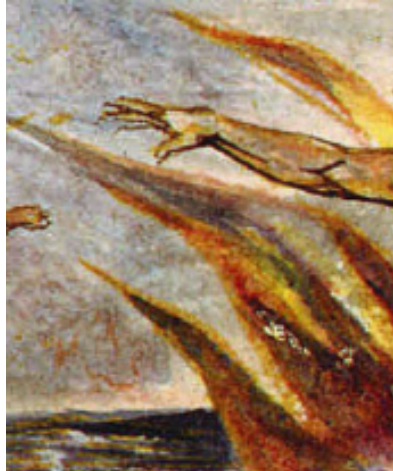
...Rintrah roars like madness re-inserted as colour into memories greyed by the chemical and linguistic bounds that contained them. Sanity is upturned with the assumptions about the 'virtues of ease', the 'just man' symbolises those in control of our mind as they walk along the 'vale of death', and try to shepherd us alongside them...

...My madness before I was brought to this hospital was eating itself, the voices were screaming my evils, a black sun rose every morning over streams and becks of blood. I felt this world unfurling from my mind and feared it, some voices announced me as antichrist. I saw visions of torture in first person and screamed for them to stop, but I was the one creating them. Whatever 'I' was encompassed and expanded everything. No one could hear, and I couldn't express what I felt except in cuts and tears; the ward may have saved my body from my gradually amassed means of ending that chaos, the knives, benzos and rope that I kept on my desk – my emergency exits. Casting back *The Marriage* makes the experience no less fearful. However, it imbibes the madness with meaning, and brings its cacophonous dialogue into conversation with that of the multitude of voices, proverbs and positions represented in the text. Casting *the Marriage* helps end the questing for endings...

... In sending back this madly read *Marriage*, for the first time this memory - replayed so often in flashbacks - sedated at points into submission - gains companionship and meaning. My writings that tried to make sense of it back then, taken literally as evidence of disease when shown to the staff, become the felt metaphors and metonyms that rumble through my lungs and ribs again, un-anchoring long held assumptions and selves and revivifying those long dead, propagating their ever-expanding progeny. The symphony of contraries, worn at points down to another's singular melody, becomes

polyphonic again. A spectrum of sounds and colours and concepts ever expanding and impossible to write except as words and aphorisms that weave analogous feelings, feelings brought back by the words of *The Marriage* but with the addition of shared experience, solidarity stretching back and forth across the centuries...

...what peculiar salvation this text brings to those memories so long disowned as the symptoms of illness. The 'contraries' of 'racing' or 'disordered' thoughts, of conflicting and arguing voices had become paralysing under directives to present some stable self, some act of integrity in meaning that eclipsed the majority of the mind. Yet here is a text suggesting 'Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence.' This 'and' replacing 'or' repositions the expanding madness of ever increasingly complex and diffuse streams of thought as a positive force, the substrate of human existence. The idea that 'Evil is the active, springing from energy' recasts the feeling of being part antichrist from one of pure horror to many of more complex, part-positive meanings. The figures of the Guardian/s, explored in my creative work, who take up position in the mind and body at the peaks of my mad experience, are now integrated with the fully human, polyphonic and prophetic mind that *The Marriage* demonstrates so well. Not only does this rescue the young man previously pinned to the hospital bed, it rescues the childhoods of mythical significance, the ones which the priests of the ICD-10 reduced to psychopathology...



...The voice of the Devil enters the text, and illuminations in richly mixed colours collide traditions of angels and demons, of heavens and hells, of flames and water together. And the voice is Grandiose, like the parts of ourselves that speak and stand in challenge to assumptions we contradict and thus are locked away from. The idea that energy and desire, those engines of so much mad thinking, are productive; that a heaven can be formed from the Abyss, that Ideas are born in this maddening whorl and that the reason, so preached by the 'psy' people, can only be a measuring force, a "ratio of the five senses", a "vacuum" if bereft of driving desire. All of this squeezes meaning from the boyonthebed's despair. Though the memory is no less scary for it, it's restored to a place within humanity, which is some salve...

... What does this passage tell us about ways of writing – about madness and about art in general? *The Marriage* is polyvoiced, dialogical, unnamed in terms of who is doing the

narration. Blake didn't initial any copies, perhaps, as some critics have noted, due to its heretical content, whose risks in Blake's work in general were heightened by the political landscape of the time. But perhaps Blake felt that attaching the voices of his madness to his name gave less precedence to their independence or multitude, or imposed upon the text his own authorial authority which risked the kind of imposition so much of the text goes on to try and map out ways of avoiding or lessening. For John H. Jones, whose readings of *The Marriage* run close to mine at points, this is the beginning of Blake's experiments with 'self annihilation' that would become more developed in the prophetic works, especially in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*: 'The title page of the marriage is the first of Blake's title pages that does not list his name as "author" of the work, and it is the only one that does not list his name at all ... [Blake is] annihilating his selfhood to avoid imposing his own limited perspective on his readers'⁶⁰...

...In mapping the ways in which 'we impose upon on another', *The Marriage* also unveils the way in which most 'psy' disciplines and theory, in myriad methods, attempt to insist, and thus impose, on authorial authority over the mind's productions as a marker of sanity, even when discussing the subconscious. Even in the abstract and imaginative realms of analytic psychological practice, often which likes to see itself in opposition to the biomedical understandings of psychiatry, the stated goal is 'self-actualisation' rather than 'self-annihilation'. As the goal in a Jungian concept of self-actualisation is to 'substitute the self for the ego as the stabilizing center of personality', selfhood and stability is recognised as the ultimate goal, even if at points, for example in

⁶⁰ John H Jones, *Blake on Language, Power and Self-Annihilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 92

The Red Book, Jung seems to communicate a loss of this stability as a creative force.

More generally though, a lack of selfhood/ authorial authority in the productions of the mad mind are seen as indicators of its disorder or disarray, and the authority to declare what is sane or insane is transferred to the therapist as a subject, still an 'alienating figure' as Foucault suggests, one in which madness and mad people's thinking is disempowered: 'psychoanalysis has not been able, will not be able, to hear the voices of unreason, nor to decipher in themselves the signs of the madman.'⁶¹ ...

...The psychologist the boy on the bed meets calmly reflects back their understanding of his attempts to reproduce the reality of his experience at the black and shining coal face of his current vision; though he doubts himself entirely and hands authority over to the 'psy' world, he struggles to understand that magic by which they could possibly grasp the immensity he feels through his trickle of words into their own world, how they could sit there so calmly, so sanely, if they truly understood...

...This kind of authorial authority over thought is also something demanded in academic spaces, one way in which Mad thinking is excluded or denigrated, whether explicitly or implicitly, in the way in which value judgements are passed on such notions as 'the strength of an argument'. Here, too, *The Marriage* at once provides what I feel are powerful explorations and insightful engagements with the work of others, while deploying methods that would be excluded from most academic settings. To begin with there is the 'Argument' which opens the text, which seems to almost mock the enlightenment idea of an argument, or the Miltonic idea of a guiding prelude to the

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001) p. 264

poem that imposes clear intentions of how the proceeding work should be understood and interpreted. The text opens with an invocation of a mythic figure – Rintrah - a son of Los who signals ‘just wrath’ and ‘revolution’ in Blake’s mythological landscape and is associated with the north point of the compass, itself the place of myth and dark imagination, of Urthona, Vala, the feminine⁶². The roar of Rintrah is an expression of raw emotion, rarely considered the correct grounds for an ‘argument’ in an academic and enlightenment sense, and often, when expressed to excess in this way, a signifier to the ‘psy’ disciplines of disorder or dysregulated emotion. Yet for Blake it is not just the opening of the text’s argument, it is also its closure by means of becoming a refrain. The usurpings of assumptions about just and villainous characters, about ease and peril, about good and evil, that are sandwiched between these refrains, form the body of an argument communicated in the feelings such upendings create in the mind, as much as in the logic they seemingly override or exceed. It is a prelude to a text in which emotional writing styles, grandiose and polemical, sage and cryptic, narrative and dramatic, personal and abstracted, are all part juxtaposed, part integrated. The effect is dizzying, intoxicating. It might be said to be Maddening. In my encounters with Blake, this is the first text that explores more deeply an idea that Mad modes of thinking might supersede the sane ones. The excess of the Mad mind(s) workings is presented unfettered by a sense that it needs to be decoded into sensibility before it has worth presented as an object of thought and of art. The Argument in *The Marriage* might also be seen as a departure from the convention of *Paradise Lost*, in which the Argument outlines the way in which the authorial presence of Milton intends the following epic to be interpreted. Blake’s Argument is voiced by an uncertain presence, and refuses to

⁶² S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1988) p. 381.

impose an interpretation, even when the language at points is laden with a biblical, judgemental tone. This confident expression of contraries, the language speaking in ways that clearly outline viewpoints which in logical terms cannot co-exist, is another way in which I feel Blake's text nods to a confidence in the meaningfulness of this maddening set of experiences and statements...

...The "Proverbs of Hell" are one of the most defiant illustrations of this attitude in Blake's work, and also one of the most explicitly 'Mad' passages of *The Marriage*. Later on in Blake's life he would repeat assertions that his "poetic Genius" was something society at large would perceive as Madness, but in *The Marriage* we have one of the earliest instances of this, even if not on this occasion explicitly in Blake's voice – rather one of the unnamed voices of the poem. This voice claims to have 'collected' the proverbs while 'walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius: which to Angels look like torment and insanity.' Mad identity, as now taken up as a positive signifier in the emergent Mad movement, is very similarly rooted initially in the declamations of such experiences by those seen as the just arbiters of what constitutes sanity in our modern age, those who become the 'thaumaturge', as Foucault describes, of what is and isn't correct thought⁶³. By collectively and polyvocally engaging in studies and writing, creative and critical, that are 'madly done', Mad Studies and the modern Mad movement 'harbour the potential to unsettle the very way we address the subject of rationality and its alternatives, thereby "Shaking the foundations of the place of reason, academia, the sum of all disciplines"'⁶⁴. By

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001) p. 262

⁶⁴ Robert Menzies, Brenda A. Le François, Geoffrey Reaume, 'Introducing Mad Studies' in *Mad Matters* ed. Brenda A. Le François, Robert Menzies, Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2012)

positioning what is decreed to be ‘insanity’ by the voices of reason and rationality as ‘genius’, I contend that the voice in this text is positioning the ‘proverbs of hell’ as explicitly Mad thought, and the wisdom as such that might be derived from them – called the poetic or prophetic ‘genius’ by Blake, as Mad wisdom, Mad knowledge...

...In her opening to the 2021 National Survivor User Network (NSUN) Conference, Rai Waddingham, a person with lived experience of psychiatrisation, a voice hearer, a vision seer, a leader in the battle for recognition of Mad people and their complex experiences outside a lens of disorder, gave the keynote opening⁶⁵. She spoke movingly about how she has to move carefully in spaces, even spaces as ostensibly friendly to madness as the collective that is NSUN. She talked movingly about the multiple different selves, genders, voices and emotions that reside within her, but that she is at risk of exclusion and sanism if she expresses. She expressed them in a public forum nonetheless, and watching her as a fellow Mad person I felt a huge outpouring of gratitude. It felt as if she was talking about similar experiences to those I find within my self(ves), those simultaneously existing, logically paradoxical yet deeply felt selves, experiences and voices all vying for attention and constructing some kind of meaning. It also saddened me that it is still such a risk for someone to take such a position, to present a wider vision of what truth might exist in madness, so long after Blake attempted it, even in a space supposedly designed for people who think in such ways. I wonder if there would be room in such spaces for Blake, for self-annihilating dialogue. Or whether, in attempting to gain an important voice to fight for people’s rights,

⁶⁵ Rai Waddingham, Opening Keynote – NSUN Members’ Event and AGM 2021 – Youtube <
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdrczyZtOnw&list=PLScL5ZOPdobLXvo9X0BIhzQopHf41OL4&index=2>>
[accessed 5/2/2022]

organisations such as NSUN have to mollify their madnnesses in order for people to listen...

...returning to the first “Memorable Fancy”, and this idea that the “enjoyments of Genius” are perceived by “angels” as “torment and insanity”, I think it is important to understand that “the enjoyments of Genius” as Madness are not the opposite of “torment and insanity”, but rather a different way to tell the story of the same madness. Angels are aligned in *The Marriage* with priesthood, rationality and reasoned argument, and the erasure of contraries in the effort to present singular truths. But in Madness this mental warfare between the contraries is ever active, the truth, if singular ‘truth’ is an admissible concept at all in madness, is a wide truth that somehow encompasses the ever-evolving productions of the prolific mind, perhaps a truth only able to be expressed to an other in the form of art – as the *Marriage* perhaps sets out to do itself...

...I find humour, satire and sombre truth in the statement, all at once. Blake does not see ‘Genius’ or ‘Insanity’ as something sublime and rising above the conflicts of energies, desires and reasoning; he finds it in the chaos of their conflict as it develops new meaning continuously, opening up new worlds, new Gods, new truths in the minds of humankind, new selves as the old are annihilated. This doesn’t negate the angel’s view of these processes as ‘torment and insanity’, but means it is incomplete. For there is meaning in said insanity once you open meaning up to belief as well as reason, once the mind stops only accepting the logical world of the angels and accepts the unfolding fires of madness as burning with meaning. Powerful insights can arise from the challenge such a mind throws up to conventions of thought, as “Proverbs of Hell” will go on to demonstrate. For a mind in Madness, such conventions don’t require

deconstructing via an effort of intellect, such as in the theoretical texts which have appropriated / colonised Madness – the way in which the world is experienced and felt, the way thoughts rumble in the belly and ideas are tasted on the tip of the tongue make the arguments for their truth by default. Perhaps this is why Blake was so strong in his convictions. Felt or ‘collected’ at the level of received truth and the experience of revelation, not deduced by analytic reasoning or clouded by egocentric notions of intellectual ownership by the ‘self’...

...The voice of the Memorable Fancy, which isn’t to be assumed to be Blake here, but which resonates with his own voice in other texts, “collects” the “proverbs of Hell”; it doesn’t claim to create them. This is in line with something Blake continuously expresses throughout his work – that he in some way receives the ideas that inform his visionary work in a manner more passive than creating them from the poetic ‘selfhood’. Another example is in the opening address of *Jerusalem* in which Blake writes about ‘when this verse was first dictated to me’ (E145). This could be a device, but given the fact that Blake’s personal history and his encounters with others seems to show a man who was very much living day to day with ‘twofold vision’ – ‘For double the vision my Eyes do see / And a double vision is always with me’ - it seems more likely to me that he is just telling his truth when suggesting that this is how revelation comes to him⁶⁶. This is not to denigrate Blake the writer or the artist, who puts great emphasis on the effort and craft of representing these thoughts in a communicable form and thus inviting others into the dialogues of his visionary world, but that the sense of some omnipotent ‘authorial’ selfhood asserting a masterly control over content and form is not apparent

⁶⁶ William Blake, Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802 in *The Complete Poetry and Prose Of William Blake* ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) p. 721

in the work. Critics, such as Frye and Bloom, who seek to establish through cryptic codification of Blake's prophetic works some *unmad* genius at work, are unwittingly sanist. What does it say about our society's fear of true madness that we are so afraid to admit that work, such as Blake's, that has gained so much cultural currency, might substantially be a product of madness itself made productive, made genius; made successful by Blake because he embraces the inherent meanings of madness, rather than work Blake succeeded in making in spite of madness. Negating the madness in Blake restrains the power of his work as a revolutionary, mad positive body of literature, keeps suppressing the potential of mad people and others oppressed by the lineation in society around what modes of thinking are valid, and which are not...

... "So the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings of garments" ... Here I believe (and belief, as the proverbs show, is the engine of truth...) that the voice of the "Memorable Fancy" is placing primacy on the unfettered expression of "infernal wisdom" (which I feel as set out earlier, is a wisdom of madness or 'insanity') over any "description" of its outward appearance. The description will always be an unsatisfactory account of the lived experience of the revelation's essence. There are parallels here with how the mad movement ascribes meaning to the unfoldings of madness itself, while descriptions that describe the experience from the outside or from a position of distance - whether psychological, pathological, prosaic or poetic - are always representing it from the stronghold of a perspective of sanity. This gives it societally sanctioned valency, but denies the receiver close access to the Madness as experienced in its own present. Contemporary challenges to the dominant mode of treating mental health/distress also emphasise the importance of engaging with madness at the point of its presence, and

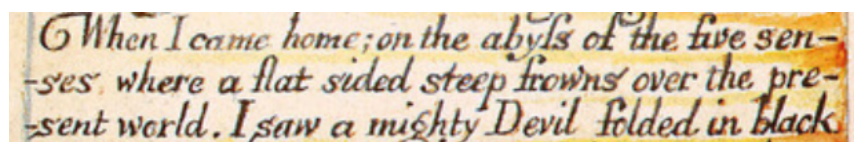
letting its unfolding, however labyrinthine and seemingly strange it might be, weave its own meanings, which are then set into dialogue with the community the madness unfolds within...

...Open Dialogue is a powerful example of this approach, and seems to be having some success where mainstream services often fail. Pioneered in Western Lapland in the late 20th Century, Open Dialogue marries ideas from systemic therapeutic approaches with a practical application of Bahktin's ideas of dialogism. Jaako Seikkula, one of the founders of Open Dialogue as a community mental health approach, states: 'The mind is voices speaking to each other; it is an ongoing process of dialogues instead of looking at one core self. What we name as personality and psychological being takes place in this inner conversation between voices. Voices are the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness [...] Instead of speaking of unconsciousness into which those experiences and emotions that we cannot deal with are repressed, it is more accurate to speak of non-conscious experiences. When experiences are formulated into words, they are no longer unconscious'. In Open Dialogue, Wilfred Bion's notion of encountering people with 'patience' without reaching after fact and reason', itself built on the Keatsian notion of 'negative capability' and avoiding 'irritable reaching after fact and reason' is held as a guiding principle by which the meanings of psychotic experiences affecting networks of people are explored.⁶⁷ Rather than understanding and naming repression and the unconscious, the psychological theories which focus on repressed memories are actually part of a culture of what is allowed to be spoken and what is not, a culture that leads people to not speak of mad experiences and of trauma, that further pushes them

⁶⁷ Nick Putman, "What is Open Dialogue" in *Open Dialogue for Psychosis* ed. Nick Putman and Brian Martindale (Oxford: Routledge, 2021) p. 23

under so they then become the proof of psychoanalysis as self-fulfilling prophecy. By abolishing an individualistic notion of selfhood and instead locating identity in internal and external dialogical polyphonic relations, Open Dialogue makes a strength of experiences often seen as deficiencies due to their challenge to selfhood. The way in which *The Marriage* is structured as a set of unattributed voices playing out in dialogue with one another aligns closely with this idea. Whatever truth it might hold is achieved through its polyphony, its unfinalizability...

...Peter Otto talks about Blake inviting a new kind of relationship with difference, one different from the sometimes cynical one emerging from deconstruction which sees it as a primary ontological state, rather seeing those categories by which we perceive difference as products of a fallen imagination, which prophetic (Mad) work can reorientate us towards. I will return to this in more detail in later sections as I examine the Madness and meanings for madness of later Prophecies, which I, like Otto, see as the fullest manifestation of this maddening re-orientation of vision for both writer and readers that Blake lays the groundwork for in *The Marriage*...



...When the voice of “A Memorable Fancy” returns home, is that home the physical presence of the body named William Blake? That voice, which walks through the fires of hell, being one of the many voices or selves that take up residence in Blake’s mind?

And who is the devil “folded in Black clouds” but a vision of Blake the printer himself, become at this point a devil in the series of endless becomings and annihilations of the Mad mind led by its inspiration, and its belief in its meanings. This Devil spun into our present by the burning of representations of its “proverbs” into plates whose productions I read, we read, the cacophony of me’s within my head, the multitude of absent addressees the mind makes and shapes with the pen and the ink, with the keyboard and the code...

...So, head and selves spinning, we descend / ascend into the “Proverbs of Hell”. What can be said about reading these writings madly which the proverbs themselves don’t already say better? Perhaps that, as a Mad person, reading what Bloom describes as “unmatched in literature for their shock value” felt like a homecoming, a place of validation, a tract of Mad kinship⁶⁸. Given the way *The Marriage* illustrates how to read the bible “in its infernal sense”, how it valorises those who make new meaning from artistic engagement and dialogue as acts of mental warfare; how it criticises those who represent “priesthood” for appropriating the inspired revelations of the visionary and turning them into Dogma...given all of that, it feels like folly to create my own imposition on the proverbs in a dogmatising manner. For me they rather encapsulate the way in which Blake’s writing is felt as instinct and energy, in the gut as much as the head. They open the mind and the senses outwards, collapsing assumed truths and mocking received knowledge. I feel a recognition of my own madness within them, in an adjacent rather than an aligned manner; that is what makes the “proverbs” so

⁶⁸ Harold Bloom, ‘Introduction’ in *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Blake’s The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) p. 3

powerful to me, they achieve a representation of a mad mind that others can find kinship through the reading and absorbing of...

...Each time I read through, or scan wildly around the facsimile of Blake's plates, individual proverbs do stick out, leave the page and enter my eyes as lenses by which I recognise or modify my own histories of visions, voices and thinking. Right now "excess of sorrow laughs, excess of joy weeps" leaps at me as particularly pertinent to common experiences of madness among my peers. While the latter part of the statement has cultural currency, a legitimate reaction to weddings, winnings, achievements and more, the former is much harder to express without attracting negative assumptions. Laughing at a funeral, for example, or at footage of warfare on the rolling news, is enough to attract ire or accusations of mental illness. Yet the sound of such laughter is familiar in the ears of the mad, both for me in my ears as one of my most common non-consensus experiences (and one common it seems among peers), but also in the waiting rooms and wards of the psychiatric machine, emitting from the lungs and the lips of fellow travellers trying to survive through a desperate humour...

...This sorrowful laughter also resonates with the way I read irony in *The Marriage*, Blake's most obviously satirical work. Humour is found in and even itself asks questions of profound spiritual and existential importance for Blake, and other questions or statements of assumed grand importance are humoured, such as the melodrama with which Blake undermines the puritanical pronouncements of the Angel the voice of the text speaks with in a later fancy: 'O pitiable foolish young man, O horrible! O dreadful state! Consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity, to which thou art going in such a career.' (E41)...

...“one thought, fills immensity” – four words that explain both catatonia and Mad enlightenment equally well (E36)...

...“improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads without improvement are the roads of genius” – again, there is something about finding something more meaningful in its raw expression rather than in its refined abstraction, its neatly tied up narrative, philosophy or ideology. In disordered thinking that sits with its disorder in its sense-making (E38)...

...“Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not believed”(E38). This seems a crucial aspect of whether we give madness currency in the making of meaning. If it is judged by whether it can be understood at the level of logic, reasoning, linearity then it is always denigrated in some way. Yet if we place faith, like Blake, in madness having meaning in and of itself, then everything changes, the Mad are accepted back into the fold as the fold expands outwards to accommodate wider meanings, to the benefit of all who are open to the ensuing revelations...

* * *

...I opened this section with ‘we are dictated to by our memory’, but who dictates our memory? Recently I searched notebooks in which I had unfolding thinking like this, but dating from a few years ago. It’s common that in doing so, I find other versions of myself ruminating or illuminating similar themes of thinking. This time, though, I shocked myself(/ves): there in the writing was a memory we hadn’t recalled, an

account of a past self saved by *The Marriage*, encountering copy H in the psychiatric ward. I wrote recently about casting *The Marriage* back as a tool to re-imagine memories of trauma, to re-narrate them in a mad-positive manner, but it seemed the Mad encounter with *The Marriage* was already extant in the history this older writing spoke about. How to read this? Was there something that led to this memory's erasure, was the casting back based on some Bailey's Beads of a past that escaped this eclipsing shadow? Or was the casting back so successful it upended time's continuum, not just re-narrating our recollection in the present of a memory, but imprinting itself in that moment on the ward, unfurling its own parallel timeline to the one of the pressed down boy we cast ourselves back to? I have reproduced the mentioned section below in italics...

...a few months have passed in madness, full of meaning, dialogue, self-annihilation-as-growth. It is hard in such places or states to put pen to paper, to voice the experience as a person when you feel so distant from that state. I have felt my body stretch to breaking point when almost catatonic in my bed, pancaked out from whatever constitutes my centre and receiving vision through such expansions, or perhaps just trespassing into the thoughts and worlds of others. It reminds me of the contrariness of Blake's prophetic works, both the singing of one person in the darkness of non-recognition, and a vast choir of characters that speak for so many different aspects of the human collective as whole, as Giant, as, perhaps, collective unconsciousness. It is by invoking Blake that I can return, and write, as a being whole enough to hammer my musings through the keys of a computer...

...I have been thinking a lot about madness as an opening into relationship with other forces, feelings and ideas that you don't try to subsume to the self, and yet are always in danger of doing

so. In some ways this is where I left off last time. Diving into Milton or Jerusalem I feel maddened and also reassured about my own madnesses. I feel with each page turned, with each plate I am sucked into, a loosening of the mental chains. But I feel the tug of 'mind forg'd manacles' everytime I try to make sense of what the poems mean to me. Sitting to write criticism is like the psychiatric encounter, as you attempt to take the infinity of madness, the impossibility of making it speak in prose and yet feel a need to bind it into some form, some Urizenic impulse. This is a tendency any Mad reading must seek to avoid...

...In Peter Otto's book *Constructive Vision and Visionary Construction*, I found the first critical approach to Blake that didn't klang against my readings and feelings about his work, which didn't either attempt to construct an overarching framework of interpretation, or to point to the lack of interpretability as a sign of Blake's failure or madness. Otto draws on post-structuralist philosophy -especially Derrida and Ricouer - and sees in Blake's prophetic works a violent decentring process of the reader that challenges what he calls a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' fathered by Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, wherein 'The reader's articulation of a text, or the yoking of the reader's discourse to that of the text, involves the translation of the text into the constituted world of the self. To articulate what is other into the world of the same.' This process of subsuming the other into the closeted world of the self means that our perception of freedom can rapidly become an enclosure. Otto goes on to add that 'Our prejudices, the world that we consciously and unconsciously constitute around us, are the initial framework of any attempt to reach that which has not been constituted by us. At the same time, they are clearly also the ground that hems us in.' This resonated with realisations I had in my late adolescence that swept the ground from beneath my feet and had me falling into some kind of hell, but one in which valuable thinking took place...

... From a confident and religious young person – one eager to learn and construct a vision of the world from the dogmas inherited or sought out from family, friends, church and school – I experienced a collapse of the self perhaps instigated by the challenge posed to such certainties and prejudices by movement through life and an increasing awareness of flux in the world and its affairs, the people close to me and those strangers I was impelled to come to know. It was/is in one version of my past - distorted by endless replaying in memory like an over used VHS – in one version of one such state of dysphoric vision that I first encountered Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell. In it I found a text which, instead of fearing such states – a recurring fear which I had traced from The Odyssey through Plato to Eliot's The Four Quartets – makes meaning of them, and uses them as a challenge to power, as contrary sites of experience from which assemblages of meaning can be made outside our binary defaults...

...the first way I encountered the poem was on the Blake Archive, and since that intense experience of adolescence I have only read the textual poem, but for the purpose of exploring its psychological impact I return to the same copy (H) as back then. Why I chose this copy over others back then now feels like a decision made while using the tarot: the first plates of each copy arranged on the screen like the fanned out cards of the pack. I chose the most vivid, the most fiery, as if doing so might help me understand the intensity of my experiences at the time. Returning now to the self-same webpage also feels a little like a séance or similar, so powerfully does it put me in touch with a self long since discarded, burned up in the fires of my madness. Tears well up in a kind mourning as I remember the snot spattered screen I first used to fall into that vivid world of the frontispiece, and as I read the words a voice from the past narrates them in some kind of haunting, not a booming and authoritative voice which the diction seems to suggest, but a scared and fragile one, a child gradually fading into experience, becoming many; becoming lost over and over...

...Unlike with my previous spiralling into London, I haven't yet spoken much about the illuminations of *The Marriage* in my whirling through Mad dialogue with the text. In part this is because I have always been so affected, so captivated and freed, by the way its words weave meaning and emotion that seem to exceed what we generally believe language is capable of. Each aphorism, each voice, each revelatory moment or fancy seems to catch and twang at the level of stomach and sinew, like a fingernail catching and leaving a guitar string shimmering with mandalas, bending time back and forth. But having encountered this past self - entranced by the colouring of copy H, and then attending a meeting of fellow Blakeans to open up dialogue around the plates, I feel ready to approach the illuminated elements, to explore how they sing to me's past and present, and to others both external and internal...

...I attend a meeting sporadically online, of people who live by their Blake's as I live by mine. Many are artists, some are people affected by madness/mental illness (defined according to their own wishes). In fact I was told some of the members first met at a Mad positive mental health support group called 'Mental Fight Club' who have created their own systems to escape enslavement by psychiatric ones. I had read extensively about Mental Fight Club before: though geographically and temporally its physical meetings were not possible for me to attend, its values and muses, set out online and in articles by its founder Sarah Wheeler, had and have been one of the things that have given me confidence in using art as a way to understand madness, and the confidence

to see madness as meaningful. Explicitly acknowledging the work of William Blake as one of their 'seven muses'⁶⁹, Mental Fight Club 'strive to value rather than reject the experience of mental illness, viewing it as a means to deepen and define our understanding of mental well-being'.⁷⁰ Perhaps to those who mention it as part of their introducing themselves to me it was not particularly important, but it helped me to feel more comfortable in the space, to feel legitimised in weaving my versions of Blake as they shared their own and they all danced and become chimaeras together by way of discussion. This idea of mental fight club - that we should value the experience of mental illness/madness, that we should 'confront and transform inner horrors as a means to greater understanding the greater potential within human existence and the world - seems to in some way encapsulate the spirit with which the group engage with Blake's work and with one another's interpretations of it, celebrating the way it colours and in turn is coloured by our own experiences⁷¹...

...We got caught for an hour on the frontispiece, which is in copy H one of Blake's most dramatically coloured illuminations, and the one which drew in that past self on the ward. Fires containing souls, angels, forms and fairies seem to generate all energy on the plate from the bottom left, yet also threaten to devour the whole page, as if the printed flames have become corporeal and tear across the print as if that corner was caught on a touchpaper...

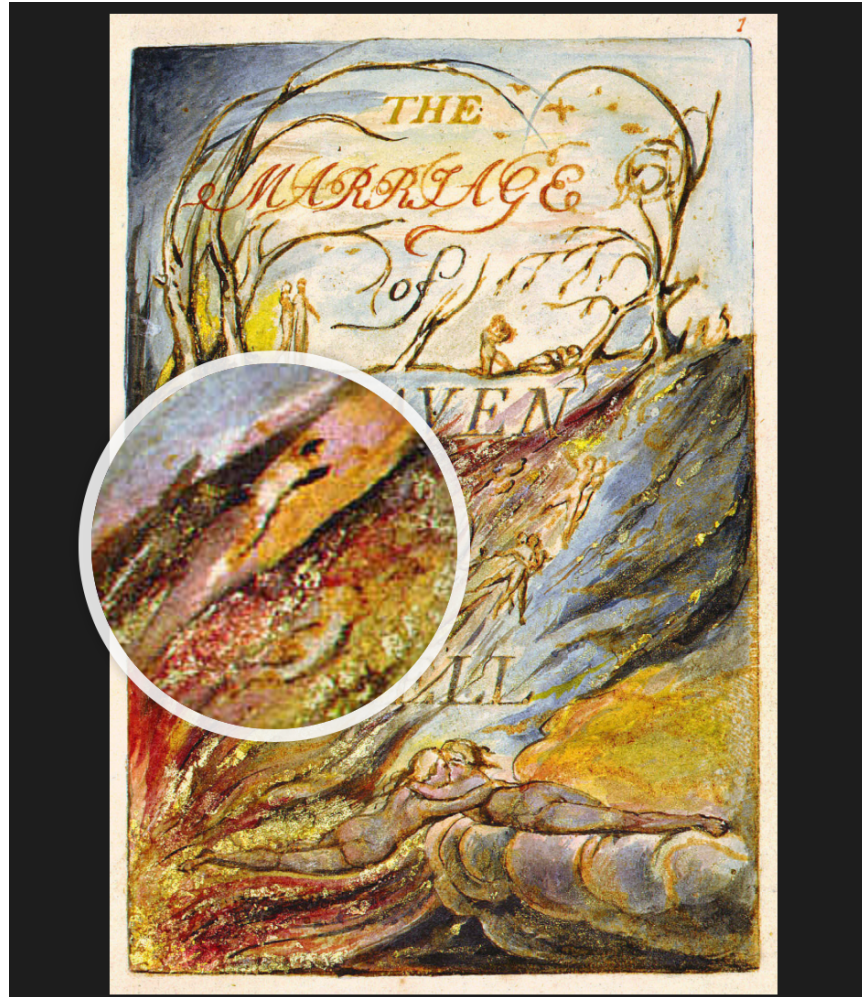
⁶⁹ < <https://www.facebook.com/Mental-Fight-Club-350291898335971/> > [accessed 31/3/2022]

⁷⁰ Sarah Wheeler, 'Fighting the good mental fight', *Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 4 Iss. 2 (Brighton, June 2005) p. 8

⁷¹ Ibid p. 8

...Like with 'London', there is a clear split on the page between a hypogeal, chaotic energy and a surface world of paler pastel colours and seeming tranquillity. The figures seems to be completely different in terms of energy depending on the side of the line they fall on. Those among the clearly delineated forms of the top sections -the clear representations of trees, birds and sky – either walk gently among the forms, as with the couple on the left, or perhaps kneel in prayer while mourning the other in the case of the couple on the right. The sky is illuminated in its 'reasoned' colour, and the birds are correctly positioned with relation to the trees, the sky, the ground...

...the hypogeal realm is a maelstrom of forms emerging from the fires. Some are fully formed faces, some are bodies, some are areas of colour and detail where the eye might see others, where others might not see. A Rorschach realm where the eyes of the one encountering the plate are invited to contribute to its content...



...It feels as if this cascade of forms and colours is pulled up by, or is feeding somehow, the roots of the tree on the right-hand side of the plate, the one with the body, potentially dead and certainly somehow fallen at its base. I start to think, absorbed by this scene, about Genesis, creation myths and the tree of knowledge, and become convinced that the dead or the fallen person who the other is bowing or pr(a/e)ying over has consumed the fruit formed from all that prolific energy the roots pulled up. The piety of the worshipper on their knee before the fall seems a weak response, but then the pious might always seem so in the face of infernal knowledge. I start to feel as

if the design *The Marriage* positions this tree as one with fruits of hell, not heaven. Is it the consumption of this fiery energy pulled up from the hypogeal hell that has felled the figure beneath the tree? Is the energy of Hell deathly to the heavenly, but generative to the throng of forms that reach and are pulled towards the trees' roots. Later on *The Marriage* speaks of the two classes of men; the prolific and the devourer. Does this image embody their pairing, both reliant on the other, as a revised creation myth?...



...on another encounter with the frontispiece I become aware of the fact that, as well as the division I have noted between the surface and hypogeal realms, there is a contrast across the vertical axis too, between generative and consuming fires on the left, and something akin to clouds and a firmament of stars to the right. These contrary visionary hell/heavenscapes are held in union by the figures of two lovers in embrace, one emergent from the flame as the other rests on a cloud. Is there something here about the revision not just of the creation myth, but of the fates of Dante's Paolo and Francesca, a

celebration rather than condemnation of the desire that is extended into eternity in a hell unbound from its negative association? The way Blake depicts the pair in his illustrations of Dante - emerging from Dante's fainted form to rejoin a spiral of lovers and simultaneously existing within a sun beam over Virgil's head – suggests an attitude towards their desire in Blake that goes beyond the sympathy in *Inferno* to something closer to a celebration...



* * * *



...On Plate 11, we encounter another one of *The Marriage*'s un-served voices, a statement about reification which has the authoritative tone of the priesthood it attacks, and yet has no authority in terms of authorial ownership. The significance of this passage for the memory of the psychiatrized boy we send back the text to save cannot be overstated, for here is the unveiling of that which props up psychiatry and the wider knowledge systems within which it is located. The development from individual, poetic, creative responses to objects and their 'adorning' with properties and placing 'under its mental deity', to the point at which a system 'abstract[s] the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood' not only serves as an attack on the use of organised religion as a system of power which distorts its origins in inspired knowledge; it also acts as a parallel critique of 'psy' systems which would form generalisations about symptoms, disorders, syndromes or neuroses which abstract people away from their individual experiences of the world in order to more easily classify them, and to then assert a system of knowledge which suggests that they (psychiatrists, priests...) can suggest that Gods, or science, had 'ordered such things.'

(E38) When we re-recognise Madness, sanity or their contraries as human creations, we can re-assert our ability and right to re-imagine what they are, and what they mean, and in doing so reclaim some power for those voices and people who priesthood or psychiatry might silence or suppress...



... Hidden between the lines of this plate is a scene in miniature, in which a headless figure - or a figure who's head is formed by the 'h' of 'the' -with a formless chaos to its right, presents another group of people to its left with a crucifix, to which they kneel in worship. By means of the head of this false deity blurring with written language and the notion of 'the gods', Blake makes clear the power of having ownership of language in shaping realities for others; the cross used to make the small figures bow rhymes visually with the 't' above it. Blake's illuminations thus present a visceral representation of the power of someone who takes up position between the raw or 'vulgar' potentiality and claims to have refined it to a system of understanding or worship that they use as a way to close off access of others to that 'vulgar', mad loam via controlling the language

by which it is spoken of. In this way they not only 'enslav'd' the 'vulgar' itself, but all those who they prevent from accessing it. This is the sad reality past selves of mine, and multitudes of psychiatrised, institutionalised fellow mad people exist within, which Blake, or this voice of *The Marriage*, can help us break free from...



* * *

...Atheism and Deism are both rare things on the psychiatric ward. That boy still somewhere stuck to the thin mattress bed is upset at the number of lights on the ceiling, four one more than the three needed, like holy music, for trinity. His closest acquaintance in the locked ward brims with the blood of Vikings, the Viking strength helps him roll away the stone from Christ's tomb, usurping the angel's place in the pantheon of his own infernal bible. Mad people engage actively with religion, are there in its making, and make of it active meanings. Blake's (or rather the Fancy's voice's)

memorable meal with Isaiah and Ezekiel seems to me to be a blueprint of just how this process unfolds. It finds mirrors in the experiences of many – whether it's mystics, prophets and poets throughout history or those subjected to the contemporary reckonings and subjectifications of psychiatry and who rail against its dogma and in doing so, rail against our culture's inherent sanism. Wouter Kusters, a Dutch philosopher and psychiatric survivor, writes from these dual perspectives in his book *A Philosophy of Madness*. His conclusion, if it can be called such a thing, is that Madness exceeds Philosophy in its weaving through meaningfulness. It brings us into ever-evolving dialogue with itself and with other mad people. Throughout the book, he moves from outlining his musings on Madness from the perspective of an academic philosopher towards someone who might be called a mad mystic, one who aligns with Blake's ideas in *The Marriage* at many points. He uses the image of a whirlpool or vortex – vortexes have their place in Blake too - to describe the way that madness pulls you in – 'It's as if you had been given infinite power to swim underwater, to dive under the ice. They are all standing above you, shouting and gesturing in order to hold you back, to pull you out, but you know you have to go deeper, underneath.'⁷² And yet he describes what might be analogous to the 'twofold vision' in Blake when emerging from the other side – 'After the whirlpool, you find yourself among the deep-sea divers on dry land, the king's children without a kingdom, the illuminati by daylight. Which means you are related to those who preceded us in the night, who did not "rage against the dying of the light" but against the lighting of the darkness. And you renew contact with the "fellow sufferers", with seers and fools and those who don't really exist. You

⁷² Wouter Kousters, *A Philosophy of Madness: The Experience of Psychotic Thinking* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020) p. 656

live in the miracle of two worlds in one.⁷³ Like when I read Blake, when I read Kousters writing, which might be considered obtuse, labyrinthine or impenetrable from the perspective of sanity, I feel kinship, as if reading the words of a peer, a “fellow sufferer”. Kusters, too, speaks like Blake of a ‘Fourfold vision’ in Madness that exceeds the 3, the trinity, which organised religion obsesses over. ‘Three is the golden mean, harmony, medium or synthesis. With three we are complete, and “we” consists of a first, second and third person. But true wisdom – which is also madness – reveals itself only in the pattern of four. The fourth person is the mysterious power by which the foundation of the three is formatted. Four is implicit and concealed, and when this four is made explicit – or is exploited (and exploded!) – then Insight appears.’⁷⁴. Can Kusters, too, be the salvation that squashed boy seeks in the ceiling lights, of which there are one too many for trinity and yet which, fourfold, reflect the emerging madness in his mind that, denied, is making him sick; that, if embraced might create or enable a horde of joyous lunatics...

...often those experiencing and espousing prophecy in our age are labelled Mad, and specifically with the ‘symptom’ of ‘grandiose delusions’, believing they are specially connected with God or Gods’, that they or/and their thoughts have bearings on the wider world beyond their personal sphere, that they have insights that others don’t. All these experiences might be said to appear within Blake’s oeuvre at points, and my readings of Blake and his madness don’t necessarily object to calling these experiences and opinions grandiose, but rather want to open up a wider meaning of what grandiose means. For when we think that our thoughts influence the world, that we are receiving

⁷³ Ibid p. 658

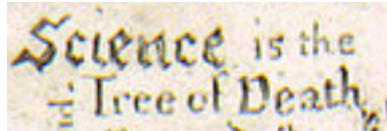
⁷⁴ Ibid p. 650

messages from Gods, when we believe we are experiencing crucial insights that have bearings of importance beyond just our personal sphere, we mean it. What we don't mean though, and what is often assumed we do by those professions operating to care for or control the mad, is that the external world, the external voices and influences, are the same thing as the 'objective reality' in which most 'sane' people feel they exist. Rather, the Mad mind is more honest in acknowledging every mind's operations on our perceptions of the external, that we can't be passive observers. This runs counter to the Enlightenment epistemology that dominated thinking in Blake's age, including both Dualism and Newtonian models of physics, yet it sits closer to our contemporary understandings of physics. Arkady Plotnisky suggests that Blake's idea of Contrariety 'is close to [Niels Bohr's concept of] complementarity insofar as the latter entails the necessity of operating with conflicting modes of description – "contraries", as Blake calls them – without synthesis'⁷⁵. Other critics have related Blake to Quantum Physics - even suggesting he prophesied the participatory multiverse – and to the philosophy of physics and perception^{Ibid}. As someone whose own Mad thinking has often been fruitfully interpreted or propped up by later encounters with contemporary physics and philosophy, I find this unsurprising. However, rather than assuming that Blake had some prescient foresight enabling him to arrive at complex scientific conclusions in a field in which he never showed any real aptitude, is it not easier to accept that in his mad states, his multiple folds of vision, such realities just made themselves known to him, were received by him in visions that he was not consciously controlling in the way someone constructing a theoretical understanding from science might. Madness by its

⁷⁵ Mark Lussier, "Blake and Science Studies" in *William Blake Studies* ed. Nicholas M. Williams (New York: Palgrave, 2006) p. 190

^{Ibid} p. 192

nature deconstructs monological understandings into heterological ones without the need for the mad person to parse data or construct experiments for meanings to emerge...



...returning to the Memorable Fancy in which a voice of *The Marriage* dines with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel can help us to understand how the Ur-reason (more of which Blake unfolds in the figure of Urizen who we shall encounter later) of enlightenment thinking, which Blake rails against for its ideological domination, which in his eyes is 'dark religion' (E407) as much as it is the science it claims holds up its laws, can also be replicated in or replicate prophecy's domineering aspects. This Memorable Fancy also helps us understand the risks of any inspirational or poetic thought leaning towards the part of its necessary grandiosity which might become dogma – the part in which the imposition - inherent in visionary worldviews which do not exhibit doubt as a defining feature - upon the other eclipses contrarities. The voice of the segment asks the prophets about this right at the opening with the question 'How they dared so roundly assert that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition' The misunderstanding that the voice of the fancy speaks is that similar to that which is encountered by the mad person's grandiose idea when it butts up against society / psychiatry – in which the non-consensus worldview is seen as a negation of the

consensus reality, rather than another adjacent to it. Yet when socialised into human societies which across millenia have tended to reify not just science but vision into dogma, as we saw in the preceding passage of *The Marriage*, the prophet/poet/mad person is not immune to the tendency towards it, especially when visionary thinking is driven by ‘firm perswasion’...

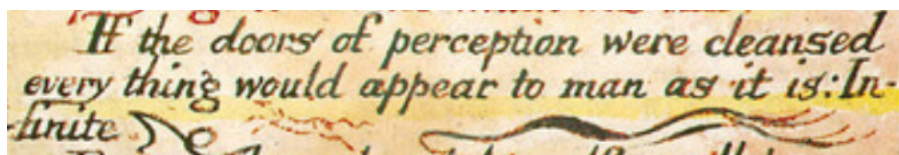
...The necessity of ‘firm perswasion’ in the power of visionary states, and perhaps as an element of mad states, is made clear by Isaiah, as is the problem with not being able to cultivate one. ‘In ages of imagination this firm perswasion moved mountains; but many are not capable of a firm perswasion of any thing.’ (E39-40). For Isaiah this state of ‘firm perswasion’ is discovered through the senses perceiving ‘the infinite in everything’ which leads him to a conviction that ‘the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God’, meaning that he writes his challenging prophetic (mad?) poetry with no fear of consequences (E39). This element seems to chime with a theme we can trace across Blake, with the Poetic Genius, whether manifested in Isaiah, in the figure of Los, or in Blake himself, seen as oppositional to domineering forces – the ‘Prophet Against Empire’ of Erdman or ‘Witness Against the Beast’ of E. P. Thompson. There is no doubting that this conception of the Poetic Genius is central to Blake’s vision at numerous points, from his earliest statements of it in *There is No Natural Religion* – ‘If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round again and again’ to its culmination in the figure of Los building Golganooza (E3). Yet that danger inherent in such strong convictions – that they themselves become a force of subjugation as we saw on Plate 11 where ‘Priesthood’ chose ‘forms of worship from poetic tales’ – is illustrated powerfully by the conversation with Ezekiel. When the

principle of the 'Poetic Genius' is elevated to God status by Israel to the exclusion of all other gods and principles we end up with a scenario in which 'all nations believe the jews code and worship the jews god, and what greater subjection can be.' The way in which the visionary 'firm perswasion' can become an imposition is a theme which continues throughout the marriage: the angel in a subsequent memorable fancy states 'thy phantasy has imposed on me' (E42). However, the extent to which these visions are impositions seems to be in part due to conceptions of them via analytics – 'It is lost time to converse with those whose works are only analytics' - which can't hold the two opposing strong convictions in a productive union without seeking to reconcile them, in the manner of 'opposition is true friendship' (E42)...



...this image from the plate that follows the discussion with Isaiah and Ezekiel brings me back to the boy(s) lying prone on the hospital bed. The consuming fire of *The Marriage*, cast back across the gulf of memory, now starts to burn the selfhood that

holds him there, unleashing elemental energies that free the analytics pinning him down, and now he, we, us are the figure rising / risen from the flames, soaring on the thermals of the unleashed madness – the madness that allows such flames to keep burning without the extinguishing force of analytics, labelling, dogma and drugs. The religion that pinned him as antichrist for his hellish visions, the science that modified similar ideological process to make him ill, the societal stigma that refused his expanding and collapsing selfhood as disorder; all are forged in the vision of flames into something more than their sum, and the mental fight that threatened to end the boy instead becomes a marriage of eternal war and love between contraries. Ideas that threaten the self are no longer repressed, dialogue between mad voices blossoms instead of threatens, or blossoms though sometimes threatening. The senses and the imagination open up to admit everything, and infinity sings as loudly as the flames weave heat into energy. As the corrosive elements of madness, mirroring Blake's acids in the engraving process, melt 'apparent surfaces' away – whether held certainties, analytically established positions, dogmatically held beliefs – infinitude is revealed, the doors of perception are cleansed...



...I return to *The Marriage* now led by one of those revived boys from the ward, the apotheosis of his madness now reimbued with meaning, leading my present mind through the fourth memorable fancy. He unveils the face of the angel 'O pitiable foolish young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! consider the hot burning dungeon thou art

preparing for thyself to all eternity’ – and, as the angel speaks these words, I realise they are spoken from the hospital ward’s interview room. I realise resonances with the pronouncements placed upon the boy, recorded in *Insight* notes as discussions despite the absence of any conversation⁷⁶. This is the way religion erases the dialogue – it speaks in pronouncements; it cannot pose the grandiosity of vision as a question. It cannot admit the mad voice as an equal other...

...the resonances stretch further than an angel dressed in the disarming tweed and flowery tie, the counterpoint to the law backed imposition of his will. They also emerge in the common themes that the voice of the fancy assumes have meaning. The shining black sun that rose over becks of blood is here in Blake ‘Black but shining’ over a ‘cataract of blood mixed with fire’(E41). The visions convincing the boy that he was antichrist, the ‘terrific shapes of animals sprung from corruption’, the ‘black tempest’ that seems to eclipse the sight of anything else, but then births a monster are seen as the manifestations of the laws that seek to deny them, a monster of religion’s creation(E41) . As I sit here in the present, trying to write something to be judged by the laws of the sane, the boy makes plain that I’m risking an imposition equal to those I try to act against, an accidental reconciliation that ‘destroys existence’ (E40). The leviathan is the endgame which psychiatry, like the angel, threatens us with becoming if we deviate from their religion, if we resist or refuse to comply with ‘treatment’. Yet it is also a consequence of their treatment, their lore. And its fury, its spiritual existence, also contains its opposition. As the Angel/doctor leaves the boy alone, he becomes the

⁷⁶ *Insight* is the electronic record keeping system used by the health trust who I was a client/patient of. Ironically these notes, in the language in which they kept and their focus on symptomology and risk management, contained little insight to the reader as to who the I in the hospital ward was, as I later discovered when I requested to read them.

harper to my present I, singing his warning about ‘The man who nevers alter his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind.’ (E42). A perfect proverb of Hell, or Mad proverb – spoken with the grandiose authority of a pronouncement, and simultaneously running counter to its certain tone in its content. The voice of the harper, the voice of the fancy, the voice of the boy reaching forwards to us from the past. They are what extracts us from the Abyss psychiatry weaves and tells us it might save us from. The Angel – surprised - is the doctor, and the parts of us who embody the message of his discipline. What we were meant to avoid colluding with - to save the boy from madness - has saved us from sanity. He shows us via his retelling of *The Marriage* that the terrifying visions that his/I’s body was shut away for/from in the ward are the underbelly of a sick society, not the mind of one sick and depraved creating unspeakable horrors, but the mind of the mad person seeing as vision the horrors that sustain that society. The visions of cruelty, war and torture, the devouring machines and beings that we try to hide away but fuel and sustain our power. The voice of the fancy’s ‘monkeys, baboons’ which, chained in one of the Bible’s houses, rape and devour each other in accordance with strength and power are the skeleton of ‘Aristotle’s Analytics’, the mechanisms of logic which uncoupled from imagination and dialogue become the monological monsters of religion, ideology, psy-chiatry / chology. But in these visions, in which they are manifested in imaginative forms, we can converse with their meanings in ways that free them and us ... the idea of mental fight club in action...



...That (un)self with freedom to think as a result of the voice of the fancy / The harper / the boy on the ward / the visionary engagement that tore apart the monological dogma and opened up meaning in madness again... that (un)self can also maintain a creative dialogue with the dialogues of others. One such figure who themselves promotes dialogue is the critic John H. Jones in his readings of Blake's work in conversation with Bakhtin a century later. What is key about the flaws in the angel's abyss, according to Jones, is that it represent a finalized version of the future extrapolated from a finalized version of the past. By building a future that itself is built on the monological passage of the church the Angel represents from the 'Stable' of the nativity to the 'mill of logic', the Angel creates an eternity that cannot accommodate discussion that might change its path, or create news paths that exist in parallel⁷⁷. By suggesting 'that the issue is up for debate: 'We will contemplate on it together'' Jones in turn suggests that the voice of the fancy 'turns the Angel's monologic assertion into an unfinalizable utterance in dialogue'.⁷⁸ My present voice in turn wants to make the link

⁷⁷ John H Jones, *Blake on Language, Power and Self-Annihilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 77

⁷⁸ Ibid p 76

here with Open Dialogue as an approach to mental health, bringing voices from that world to converse with those in Blake's work and with John H. Jones so that they may learn from each other. They sit around a table in my mind, putting forward their ideas as parallel truths, the polyphony of their conversation creating new truths in the ways in which they harmonize and also in their dissonances. Open Dialogue as a model is warned not to become a religion, excluding the dialogue with others in its eagerness to change the world according to its vision, which in itself is based on the tolerance of uncertainty as a principle: the voice of the fancy says we need to tolerate certainty too, as a part of dialogue – *we cannot not impose on each other*, but we can impose without silencing and thus keep on singing as a chorus of meanings. Jones never properly acknowledges value in the 'torments of insanity' by keeping his concepts of self-annihilation anchored in his application of Bakhtin's dialogism as a rational philosophy, not a call to foreground the perspectives of the mad, the 'carnavalesque' in Bakhtin. Jones is never himself around the table with Bakhtin and Blake, and so misses the key aspect of *The Marriage's* madness; the Angel is just as much a part of the voice of the fancy as its 'I'; the fancy's model a universe of conversations arising in madness when we let it run its fanciful, sometimes terrifying course; a course that is as full of self-consuming and chained baboons as it is inspiration and insight; as full of repressive, controlling, imposing voices as it is those that doubt, challenge, inspire. To interact with Blake's text as I feel he intends, we must allow the text to represent the annihilation of its own selfhood, or rather the selfhood of the artistic force behind it. Reading it madly also requires that we annihilate the selfhood with which we read, something Blake goes on to express in ever stronger invocations to the reader in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* especially. Jones tracks this development in Blake, but in applying a detached, academic style of writing to his analysis of Blake via Bakhtin, Jones uses a 'centripetal' force of

language that, though discussing heteroglossia, limits it in language and conventions such as the 'preface', 'introduction' and 'conclusion'. The openness to dialogue that on one level Jones seems to advocate for in his conclusion is undermined by a stylistics that seems to claim authority for his text's voice over others: 'The dialogical Ideal for which Blake strives, then, is an inclusive one, even if some of the included voices seem to impose their truth upon others. For the dialogic ideal to exist, it must include the very elements that seek to stifle it. The resistance to exclusionary domination can only be maintained by continuous self-annihilation'⁷⁹. This is a pull towards centralisation which it feels like Blake resists in his texts, yet also an enactment of the necessary grandiosity of maintaining a worldview not governed by doubt, even when expressing a maxim governed by it. For John H. Jones, who sees the *Marriage* as a Mennippean Satire, this is self-annihilation as irony. Yet naming self-annihilation as primarily an ironic mode locks out its madness, and the ability of mad thinking to hold both sincerity and irony at once. It saves Jones having to abandon society's Sanist assumptions about its (Madness's) (lack of) meaning, both in relation Blake and our reception of his work, but also in relation to his own selfhood, which throughout his book is never annihilated as a stable voice itself...

...The Mad movement, and figures within it, provide examples of both how damaging trying to monologically reign over the heteroglossia of our madresses, our array of voices can be, and how to use such madness to our advantage. *The Marriage* in its memorable fancies, in which antagonists, whether prophets, angels or devils, face off in debates within the minds of the fancies' voices, themselves the many voiced creation of

⁷⁹ John H Jones, *Blake on Language, Power and Self-Annihilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 216

Blake's visionary madness, remind me of one such example. Peter Bullimore is a foundational figure in the Hearing Voices Movement in the UK, who now trains people in an approach to voice hearing which is about helping people come into dialogue with their voices and their meanings called The Maastricht interview. He states 'It was only when he came off the medication and met people who share his experience that he was able to stop being so afraid of the voices and actually start listening to them'⁸⁰, and found meaning in his madness that directly helped him through difficult periods where he had become stuck in life. In a film he made with Rosie Yates - *Away with Voices* – he describes moving past deep feelings of guilt he was trapped within for years in psychiatric services in what appears to be his own 'Memorable Fancy' in which he put himself on trial in court and found himself not guilty⁸¹. Like Mary O'Hagan, he found meaning not in spite of his madness, but through it. "I wouldn't want to get rid of my voices now, they're part of me"⁸². I undertook Maastricht Interview training with Peter myself as part of my work within mental health services. In the process of the interview there is never any questioning of the voices' reality for the person concerned, nor is there any doubt as to the fact that the voices have meaning. The interviewer and the interviewee work together to explore the voices journalistically, asking and answering questions about when they started, what they say, whether they have names...this is all undertaken alongside a person, and while they talk through their life story in relation to the voices. During the training Peter discussed a man who had heard voices telling him to kill himself over and over again while he was homeless, despairing and misusing

⁸⁰ Peter Bullimore and Anna Sexton < <https://mentalhealthrecovery.omeka.net/exhibits/show/peter-bullimore> > [accessed 19/3/2022]

⁸¹ Film currently offline. Peter discusses the same courtroom in his mind on the following video – Peter Bullimore *The Power of the Narrative* at 29:00 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DBXm0eanjA> > [accessed 5/8/2023]

⁸² Peter Bullimore and Anna Sexton < <https://mentalhealthrecovery.omeka.net/exhibits/show/peter-bullimore> > [accessed 19/3/2022]

alcohol in a harmful way. Using the interview he was able to understand the voices were telling him to end the life of a selfhood that “was going nowhere”, but that his physical body need not end with it. It struck me that he was a living and breathing example of both the value of attentiveness to the messages in madness, and the power of self-annihilation as a way to overcome mental and societal barriers. However, this was not rooted in a romantic notion of madness as the flipside of genius; it was a story of almost intolerable pain of who’s mechanism madness was both part of and also the key to its succour. Madness is not then a force for good or bad, but a loam of voices whose heteroglossia resists monological meaning making and enacts the polyphony of truth in a sustainable way, however painful that truth may be at times to exist within in the infinite flux of its lived reality, the cacophony of its presence...

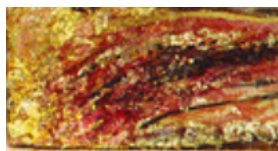
...that boy seems to have annihilated himself entirely, but his body rises up from his selfhood’s ashes with bright eyes and burning flames of hair to guide me through the final memorable fancy. He is the Angel consumed in fire and becomes an Elijah, a prophet of the saviour – Madness – that stalks behind these words and behind these thoughts. Like the Devil’s Christ, he breaks the mind forg’d manacles of the Ten Commandments and like the Devil and the Angel of the fancy, we sit now – mind in mind – to read the infernal Bible of Hell – in this case *The Marriage* itself. Imposing on me like a haunting, yet in turn a haunting I imposed upon him to save him from the Angels of instruction on the ward. We switch and swerve between the pressure of doubts that seize our heart into panic, and the flames of inspiration into which we joyfully, painfully, productively lay our selves like kindling. And we weep, because madness hurts...



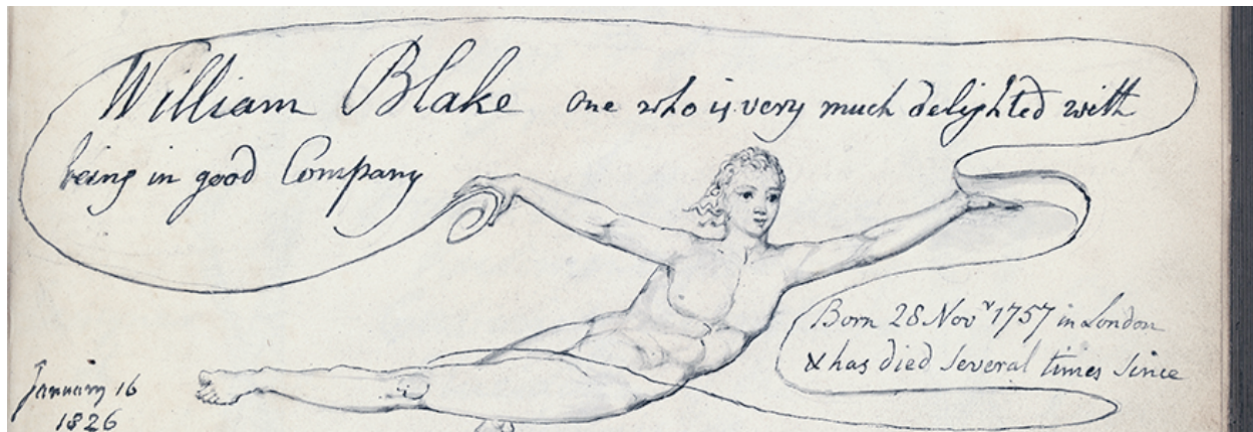
...It is this weeping the voice of "A song of liberty" calls for, the counter to the 'sick silent' coast of Albion, to warm the "shadows of prophecy" from their 'Shiver[ing]'"(E44). A weeping which John H. Jones describes as 'an anguished but healing utterance that breaks through and overwhelms the oppressive silence'.⁸³ The song seems to mark the arrival of Blake's later mythology; a prelude as a conclusion which fits with the spirit of *The Marriage's* topsy-turvy landscape. 'The jealous king' who 'promulgates his ten commands' seems to be a precursor to Urizen, Blake's later amalgamation of imperial, industrial, rational, empirical and ideological thinking into a monstrous Ur-father masquerading as Godhead of his own closeted world mistaken for totality. 'The son of fire' could be Orc, sharing his position in the east and rising to stamp 'the stony law to dust'. As *The Marriage* ends, Blake appears to be establishing a

⁸³ John H Jones, *Blake on Language, Power and Self-Annihilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 80

future for the 'Unnam'd Forms' that reside in the fifth chamber of his printing house in Hell, and receiving them in the form of figures that will populate 'the forms' of books that set out to explore the meaning of his visionary madness, that lay a blueprint for others to do the same without having to make the vision sane (E40). The dangers and the necessity of the elements of madness; of imposition, of grandiosity and 'firm perswasion'(E39); of the 'enjoyments of genius' which are at another level 'torments and insanity'(E35); of angels and devils and minds which can hold them both in their flights or "fancies"; of maxims which undermine the notion of maxims and are still asserted with sincerity as well as irony...all these are explored and open to dialogue with his readers' and critics' own imaginations, and if they let them open up, with their madresses. And the selves that those readers carry with them are changed and revived, rewritten out of stony certainty into active energy by the minds that hold them in the present, which in turn are influenced by the past selves they bring to bear. In turn, the selves and annihilations that seek to make themselves felt in madness find outlets in words; our hands, as Blake would have wanted, turn to the pen - our sword in the eternal mental fight, flowing out not to limit meanings but rather, as a chorus, to make them sing...



IV.



84

...How do I - connect this pronoun 'I' - uncomfortably inhabited - with the technicolour 'I' that wrote with these similar hands, these gnarled branch climber's fingers, just weeks ago? Sat at the same bureau, battered wood stain reconnected with rings as markers of age by means of the countless coffee cups these clumsy hands shook bitter liquid beyond, the desire to make meaning from madness – that in itself made madness meaningful – deserts me. I look back on the 'I' still sat strangely at the same desk and a whorl of metaphors appear like a fanned out deck of the tarot. Which suits the sensation best? Not the seeing as if through smoked glass – the 'I' beheld by the eye is too sharp and too startlingly present – so much so the smoked glass lens evokes a feeling of longing for itself. Not the seeing as if watching oneself on a screen – for this dissociation of being outside the self would mean the dissonance between these contrary states of being could be dissected by means of that distance. It's more fitting to use a metaphor of music - the admix of sound brought into being by waves of *desiremademeaning* - and

⁸⁴ <https://blakearchive.org/images/bb208.1.1.ms.100.jpg> [accessed 17/1/2023]

its absence – distinct selves weaving a new tone the way that oscillators create new sonics when modulating one another in a synthesiser, the musical sum much more emotive than the logic behind it, something beyond a note or a sign; something fleeting in its existence as the two – three – four operators slide through one another, a sound that records that fleeting moment, enabling us to revisit it, to open it up and explore it, expand it, redeploy it until it doesn't recognise itself...

...Is this self-annihilation as a creative act of madness. Do you annihilate your self every time you write past experience, old selves operating through new ones until neither remain the same? Is this the way that suicide, so apparently impending in doctors and nurses notes that torch beams entered that boyonthebeds space like search lights every 15 minutes, was escaped? Annihilating the mental construct of selfhood, leaving the body and brain changed but alive, vibrating with new and glassy resonances...

...When in previous writing did *my Blake* start to get replaced with *Blake*? What a powerful effect the dropping of ownership has in language telling stories of the other! This is the paradox singing at the heart of this matter – by taking leave of ownership at the level of language, one can gain power for an idea, or over a person. By absenting my self I came to own a version of Blake I didn't acknowledge my role in creating. At the level of constructs this is how the 'psy' disciplines claim their power – by absenting any discussions of who or how its constructs became reified, we forget that they are creations; at the level of selfhood this is how the mad gain theirs – by disowning a "sane" selfhood you are already struggling or unable to inhabit authentically, you can interact in different and in more productive ways with trauma, memories, systems of oppression. You can utilise more of the imaginations power, and the power of the

madness which is limited when the fear of losing that sane selfhood eclipses the potential latent in doing so... This seems to be one of the dominant sites of the mental war stretching from Blake's present to mine, to ours...

...the trick of absenting the self, the mode by which *The Marriage* achieved such a philosophical and panoptical attack on the philosophical and panoptical, helped that boyonthebed take a degree of control back in the last of these structures like chapters, allowed some greater notion than 'selfhood' to become a vessel on which he could disembark the 'illness' put upon him: the subjectification dodged, or perhaps slipped from like a bar of soap escaping the grasping hand...

...But there is no utopian heaven and/or hell within which we can entirely reside, no society in existence by which we can navigate without the tethers or masks of selfhood and the subsequent tensions that madness creates between it, us and the world's in which we move...

...my I('s) want to explore what I feel is Blake's works ultimate acknowledgement of the above reality, the acknowledgement that neither utopianism or satire can unchain a mad mind entirely from dialogue with the world's without, which also construct and dialogue with the world's within, and vice-versa. This is a Blake who ended his epic *The Four Zoas* triumphantly 'The dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reins' but then wrote in a notebook 'Tuesday, Janry. 20, 1807 between Two and Seven in the Evening – Despair'⁸⁵. My contention is that in the prophetic works, described in the

⁸⁵ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Minerva, 1995) p. 297

form of their apotheosis – *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion* – as ‘a perfectly mad poem’ by Southey⁸⁶ – Blake (or the many Blakes...) discover(s) a poetic method, and a visionary method for living madly, one which enables the tensions between selfhood, multiplicity of self, the emotional feeling of ideas as concrete and embodied, the integration of other ideas - whether as feelings, ideologies, beliefs - into character’s via interpellation...which enables all of these to be held together without shying away from the contrary aspects of them all, the doubts... without reducing the polyphony of truth to the closure of argument, to the reduction of singular vision, ideology, position. That, perhaps not in the way in which Southey meant, a version of Blake, or versions, came to create something that is one of the finest bodies of work in which we can recognise meaningful madness – a ‘perfectly mad’ poetry...

...The varying levels and strategies Blake uses to channel and represent his visionary madness mean any analysis of the way in which they work can seem overwhelming, even if the effect of them all working in unison might appear resonant and immediately recognisable to a Mad mind reading the work. Conversely, they might seem obtuse or incomprehensible at a more ‘sane’ level. Wouter Kusters speaks explicitly to this phenomenon and experience in *A Philosophy of Madness*. ‘Something that seems like incomprehensible gibberish – incoherent stories and bizarre expressions – can contain a large measure of coherence for the person himself. In the reports of my own case, “incoherent” thinking was brought up just when I was experiencing a greater form of coherence.’⁸⁷ This chimes with my own experiences – the poems I myself wrote while

⁸⁶ Ibid p. 311

⁸⁷ Wouter Kusters, *A Philosophy of Madness: The Experience of Psychotic Thinking* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020) p. 635

interned in mental hospitals or based on the revelations rising from the experiences which had me locked into them are the ones which represent the most profound experiences of my mental life, yet they were written off as proof of pathological illness by staff 'treating me' on those same wards. Kusters find ways to de-pathologise his experiences, or at least parallels that he finds empowering in the effort to do so, in the work of other writers, such as Artaud, in whom among other Mad writers he identifies the importance of apocalypse as 'a plan of collapse' rather than 'the collapse of a plan', a mad reality or prophecy in which figures such as the antichrist and Shiva mix and make meaning with 'earthly chaos close to home, where signs of doom permeated every day life.'⁸⁸ The combination in Artaud of an apocalyptic vision that combines ideas of 'Christ rising up as a Furious One who *will* overthrow ALL churches' and an antichrist who 'frequents the Deux Magots', a café in Paris⁸⁹, shows a visionary madness with many resonances with Blake's later work, finding contemporary situations and figures blended with biblical and apocalyptic imagery, and a sense of the impending overthrow of institutions. One example of this in Blake can be found in the unquestioning integration of figures such as Schofield and Cox, the soldiers who accused Blake of sedition, into the epic mythology of Jerusalem, so that they become agents of apocalypse 'Schofield! Kox [...] They war, to destroy the Furnaces, to desolate Golgonooza: / And to devour the Sleeping Humanity of Albion in rage & hunger.' (E147) Despite an outward appearance of collapse of unity, Kusters notes that 'we can discern far more unity and coherence than we would expect [...] what appears to be

⁸⁸ Ibid p. 643

⁸⁹ Ibid p. 643

chaos, incoherence and the end of the world may simply be elements or aspects that develop *within* the mad plan and not so much the fragmentation [of the plan].'⁹⁰ ...

...The way in which, what might have been described as or appeared to be fragmentation or incoherence to a 'sane' outside observer, is actually a development of themes that might have always, or for a long time, been present for a person, is something we hear time and again in accounts of madness. Mary O' Hagan's short piece, *Two Accounts of Distress*, juxtaposes her personal diaries while an inpatient on a psychiatric ward with the notes recorded about her on the same day. This was a time she describes as 'one of the most intense, profound experiences of her life' in the short film *Madness Made Me*.⁹¹ Within this powerful catalogue of Mad experience we find sincerely written experiences with a raw physicality to them which is strikingly analogous with some of the descriptive passages within Blake's later works, where the feeling just of being in the world is experienced as a violence: 'My back is hard like a shell, my soft is soft like jelly. I hate to stand because I cannot shield my front from the jabbing gaze of the world.' 'I have lost myself. What is my name? I have no name. All I am is shape and weight, rapid shallow breathing and black space inside myself.' 'I am locked here alone in this black box. I used to hide its blackness with colourful decorations. On its walls I painted windows with pleasing views on them. Now I have been stripped right back to the bare boards of my mind.'⁹² How resonant these passages are with Tharmas' speech in night the first of *The Four Zoas*:

⁹⁰ Ibid p. 643

⁹¹ < <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/madness-made-me/> > [accessed 8/1/2023]

⁹² http://www.maryohagan.com/resources/Text_Files/Two%20Accounts%20of%20Mental%20Distress.pdf [accessed 8/1/2023]

Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul
Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax to dry
The infant joy is beautiful but its anatomy
Horrible Ghast and Deadly nought thou find in it
But Death Despair and Everlasting brooding Melancholy [...]

I am like an atom
A Nothing left in darkness yet I am an Identity
I wish & feel & weep & groan Ah terrible terrible. (E302)

Both writers describe the pain of a madness stripping away all that was once protective of the person, all that once formed barriers and windows that dressed 'the bare boards' of the mind, the 'horrible ghast and deadly' anatomy exposed behind the veil of infant joy. My own writing also has parallels, take for example the closing of the poem 'Jubilee' in the collection preceding this text:

and the light tide retreats
to the filament's dimming coil

*it's on you now –
begin
or be gone*

Yet there the key to its meaning is contained within O'Hagan's mad system, embedded within it are revelations. The key is – as with so many other mad accounts - in a creative response, a compulsion to create, a visionary voice other than the self which invites the fight to 'begin', not 'be gone':

Before, my thoughts were sliding off into nonsense. This terrified me so I tried to make some sense of things by taking bits out of nonsense and putting them into a story.

An old woman and her grand-daughter lived by a great ocean. Every day the old women went fishing. She yelled in awe to the ocean, 'Let me take the life out of you with my net.' She always returned with fish and cooked them for herself and her grand-daughter. One day she gave some of the fish to her grand-daughter and said 'Cook these for yourself'. The girl wailed 'I can't'. The old woman replied 'You must find your own power'. But the girl didn't understand and went to bed hungry. That night the girl woke from her dreams to a booming voice from the sky: 'You have the power of the old woman and the great ocean flowing into the core of you. Now, take meaning from the rawness of life and cook it for yourself without fear'⁹³

The engagement with her madness in a creative and mythic sense could hardly be more Blakean. Yet her note on the day from the psychiatrist stated: 'Thoughts still coming in "fragments". Unable to complete them. Still spending most of time on bed.' The juxtaposition that Kusters notes between the external appearance fragmentation and the internal sense of the madness containing important coherent (within the system of the madness) ideas is reflected here. Within mad spaces such as hearing voices or peer support groups, such stories are shared openly and mad people support one another to have confidence in the meaningfulness of their experiences, without the need for some thaumaturge or therapist, however sympathetic or otherwise, to do the deciphering, while also providing help in surviving them, as they are often 'raw' and painful, 'dark' if also potentially 'profitable'⁹⁴...

⁹³ http://www.maryohagan.com/resources/Text_Files/Two%20Accounts%20of%20Mental%20Distress.pdf
[accessed 8/1/2023]

⁹⁴ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 138

... Hearing Voices Groups and other groups and communities self-organised by people with lived experience of madness are, very understandably, reluctant to admit researchers or give permission for their information to be used in ways they don't control themselves, as almost all attendees will, like myself(ves) had experience of this disclosure leading to power being wielded over them in sometimes brutal ways. However, just using anonymised public comments from the Hearing Voices Networks own webpage which is publically accessible, you can easily find accounts of people feeling empowered to share their mad experiences as meaningful ways of making sense of the world. I myself find some sense of kinship similar to that which I find in reading Blake, not just when meeting other Mad people but even reading through accounts on support forums like these. A sense that having a belief in the meaningfulness of your non-consensus experiences of the world is something other than delusional...

... One commenter notes 'It's so wonderful to find a site that doesn't classify this phenomena as a mental illness. I saw Angels when I was very young and they've been with me ever since, at least I hung on to that thought as I went through many childhood traumas and abuse.'⁹⁵ The parallels with Blake here are obvious, though it must be said that in a 21st century, secular and western society the likelihood of experiencing Angels resulting in you becoming stigmatised as "mentally ill" is far greater than it would have been in Blake's own age where millenarianism was still common enough, and literal belief in biblical and religious themes was probably a majority position among many

⁹⁵ <https://www.hearing-voices.org/hearing-voices-groups/> [accessed 14/1/2023]

groups. It is clear in biographical accounts and in Blake's own letters that in later age, though still battling with experiences of the world in the kind of mental and artistic warfare he had taken up as his reason for being on earth, the visions, insight and this mental fight with ideas were important. In letters written months before his corporeal death in 1827, he continues to assert his belief 'In the Real Man The Imagination Which Liveth Forever' and raves against 'Newton's Doctrine' and 'The Divinity of Yes and No'⁹⁶, continuing to uphold the visionary commitment to the mental and spiritual warfare against the binaries and ratios of scientific method his visions exploded earlier in his life, as seen in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and explored in a non-linear sense in all the prophetic works following...

...Another commentor on the website says 'I think the voices, seeing things, sensing [sic] things, is not an illness it is part of being a Human being. Maybe we are evolving and we just don't realize it. And society does'nt [sic]accept us.'⁹⁷ The same commenter notes the importance of belief in 'a higher power at work, at least with some situations' but in terms of what might be called esoteric wisdom 'outer body experiences, paranormal things, phsycology [sic], how the brain works, The bible, evolution, I read the book proof of heaven, God' rather than any fixed dogma'⁹⁸. We see obvious parallels with Blake here in terms of both the confidence in the meaningfulness and innate humanity of Mad experience, the interpellation of the mad experience with pre-existing and contemporaneous esoteric knowledge, but also the sad refrain you find over and over and over in such places, and in Blake's own records of a common frustration – society doesn't accept us...

⁹⁶ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) pp. 202-203

⁹⁷ <https://www.hearing-voices.org/hearing-voices-groups/> [accessed 14/1/2023]

⁹⁸ Ibid

... Interestingly, the apocalyptic, religious and revolutionary imagery we find in Blake, O'Hagan, Artaud and Kuster's accounts of Vision and/or Madness seem common too. Another commenter describes an experience highly resonant with ones of those listed and also my own – 'I experienced what appeared to be rapture at one time with people climbing on buildings and houses outside of apartment and racing to the sky as I heard the voices telling me of how some were going and others staying and hearing familiar voices saying things that were scary, strange, and involved in the theme of everything ending.'⁹⁹ The same person goes on to describe what sound like scary but ultimately extremely important revelations – 'I thought it was the devil in the past and I felt it might have been God or an angel and then at other times a spirit of someone. I feel that there was a lot more help than the negative side of things and I have never known if it was multiple voices, if they swapped out at times back then, and then as if someone good won out and has stayed by me to protect me from the negative and dark gaining a hold again.'¹⁰⁰ Another commenter writes 'Heaven and hell are not in some other place, but are here in another realm on Earth. These realms are dimensional and timeless. Each experience of visitations or seeing spirits, which the medical world call delusions are actually indications of our spiritual journey, or what I see as a mathematical equation/calculation of who we are and what our purpose is on this planet.'¹⁰¹ The 'realm on earth' in which they exist is of course, for Blake, the 'Human Imagination' (E147). Like the commenter above, heaven and hell are close by for Blake. God is not 'afar off' but rather 'within your bosoms I [the saviour] reside, and you reside in

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.hearing-voices.org/hearing-voices-groups/> [accessed 14/1/2023]

¹⁰¹ Ibid

me.’(E146) My own experiences of madness, at the points of their apotheosis, take on a similar and often terrifyingly real spiritual/personal nature, which I try to write as close to the experience unfolded as I can in ‘An Entrance (2)’

Inside images torture, hooded figures
debased in first person
despite voices speaking Ur-evil
in language biblical
and personal, Ur-angered father/mother
accents twanging guts like guitar strings
until Ur-wretching over the sink

*Now rising see my antichrist
watching from the mirror
as Ur-options shrink to
ligature, knifeblade
or an entrance into my flickering ellipses,
my eyes black orbs which eclipse the world
as you raise your hand to mine, sirens approaching*

...Ultimately, there are an increasing number of people who choose to embrace and communicate the Mad experience as meaningful in our own times, even if they don’t fully grasp in a “rational” way its meaning or feel they have ownership of it in an authorial sense, in ways similar to Blake. Finding others who share that belief in Mad meaning, and who don’t insist on doubt and scepticism as the basis of methods of understanding these experiences, is crucial to those people feeling empowered to do this. As another commenter relates – ‘Upon landing on the site I read descriptions of voices and other occurrences and it was as if I had written parts of the information. Nice to find you.’¹⁰² As it was so important for me to find Blake, I find excitement in the thought that on some parallel timeline beyond that of our corporeal bodies existing centuries apart, he might find recognition and mutuality within the Mad positive

¹⁰² <https://www.hearing-voices.org/hearing-voices-groups/> [accessed 14/1/2023]

communities of the present day. This imaginative liberty aside, I also hope the above helps to further illustrate why I feel there should be validity in understanding Blake's work as a product of Mad meaning making and/or an artistic expression of Madness. An expression of the kind of Mad experience myself and other Mad peers feel empowered to share as a result of this mutuality and recognition within Mad spaces, and increasingly the support of Mad scholarship for their validity and necessity...

... People in the Hearing Voices Network and other survivor and peer spaces all have individual responses to their experiences, rather than totalising methods that focus on the notion of a "best path" of understanding, a desire for whatever systems are discovered by exploring things in new ways to become a new orthodoxy, something Peter Beresford notes is something 'activist psychiatric system survivors have log guarded against'¹⁰³. One thing that does unify their approach is a belief in that plurality of meaning making itself being a good "method" for understanding and healing, without the need for any testing out of new methods, of creating new systems, leading to an imposition of one over others. This feels like it has importance for how we conceptualise knowledge production beyond just thinking explicitly about Madness, a challenge to commonly established notions of what method might be itself...

...In his introduction to the book *Blake and The Argument of Method*, Dan Miller charts the way in which Blake studies have evolved and makes the case for a redefined focus on method to take Blake criticism forwards. He is not entirely an advocate for the idea

¹⁰³ *Mad Matters* ed. LeFrançois, Menzies, Reume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013)

that ‘method suggests that a specific path is [...] optimal’ that ‘there may be other routes, but they will not lead you to your goal’ or if they do ‘they are longer and more arduous or less easily followed.’¹⁰⁴ Rather, taking influence from maxims Blake himself lays out in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – ‘The crooked roads, without Improvement, are roads of Genius’ (E39), Miller suggests that there is a ‘method of just indirection’ advanced by Blake: ‘Blake’s maxims for travelers suggest that, while roads and methods are necessary, the most obvious and common way will, by necessity, miss its destination[...] If there is a truly Blakean methodology, it may be necessary to approach it tangentially. Some paths require detours’¹⁰⁵ This seems to be a good basis for a different approach to knowledge production, and fits with a critical picture more widely at the time of Miller writing dominated by post-structuralism and deconstruction, which certainly fit with the notion of ‘crooked paths’...

... Miller and, it’s implied, the co-editors go on to state that following what they call ‘Blakean principles’, which they see as being the mode of study many critics following on from Northrop Frye ‘confined’ themselves to, is ‘itself a methodological decision made on extrinsic grounds’ and therefore diminishes the validity of what Miller describes as the ‘prevailing fear’ among critics that ‘extrinsic’ methods are more risky than ‘intrinsic’ methods¹⁰⁶. Frye and others following have created systems onto Blake’s own, systems which decode it and suggest a logical and coherent method behind his work, readings that shut out the madness. This adoption of ‘Blakean’ principles,

¹⁰⁴ *Blake and The Argument of Method* ed. Dan Miller, Mark Bracher and Donald Ault (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) p. 1

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* p. 3

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* p 8

which have been derived from the critics exegesis unquestioningly as if they are intrinsic to Blake's work, is indeed a imposition of extrinsic method under the illusion of being an intrinsic one. However, the notion of method itself, even if admitting more devious paths, ultimately being the tool with which to decide critically what is of more or less value – both in terms of Blake's work itself and the critical writing unfolding from engagement with it using methods, is upheld by Miller and the contributors to the volume more generally. At the end of the introduction, Miller writes 'The debates concerning method will eventually take us in some direction. These arguments have very real consequences for the teaching and cultural uses of Blake, so there must be, in the long run, winners and losers.' Ultimately then, though broadening of ways to engage with the text which can only be seen as a positive, the notion of winners or losers of arguments – which in a way means a cease or at least pause in mental fight – the way in which 'rethinking the logic' of critical paths might lead to some methods losing, and thus being seen as of lesser value, is in contradiction to and a sanitising of the maxim Miller opens the chapter using as a guide – the *without improvement* – is rejected for a more Darwinian notion of 'winners and losers' which is a process which also reduces the contrariness and madness inherent in a continuous opening up of engagement with Blake and with multiplying methods. This mirrors an ultimate tendency to 'reductionism' even if by way of initially opening up new ways of thinking, which the aforementioned pluralism in Mad Studies and, perhaps in what influences it, Mad experience itself, stands against. Obviously, there is a danger that in standing against you are taking a side that might win or lose itself. But that is because of the way rational perspectives suggest this as an act of antagonism in a way that the experience of madness undermines. To use another Blake Maxim 'Opposition is True Friendship' (E42)...

... In reading the later prophetic works of Blake I find the expression of a visionary, mad experience at its most powerful and insightful precisely because it admits the full spectrum of drama, passions, conflicting and contrary states, selves and statements that make up visionary madness, mixing the personal with the religious, the political with the mythic. What methods inform Blake's thinking are multiple and conflicting, their earthly originators often named but then extrapolated into giant forms represented by the Four Zoas, their emanations and spectres, which morph and weave, gain power and lose it, oppress and are oppressed in non static, non linear formations throughout. Though lots of work that seeks to clarify what the Zoas represent holds some value, one of the most important aspects is their mutability and their varying states of power / oppression, of imposing upon each other and thus modifying each other, of developing different energies and emotions on an epic scale but also a corporeal and physical way that affect me reading them as much at the level of the body – spines tingling, gut aching, heart racing, as they do at more cerebral levels. These kind of experiences and thoughts may well have driven windows of more “clear” insight in Blake's earlier poems such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience* – as in Kuster's analysis of mad plans having internal sense, there is a unity to the themes across Blake's work from the earliest to the last – but their mechanisms of action are occluded from view (perhaps even from Blake's view) until these later, longer works unfold. In *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake mythologises madness at the level of the experience itself, channelling it onto the page raw...

... He even, during this period of his life, uses ‘madness’ in a positive sense for the first time. Though he is generally keen to distance himself from madness in the form of an

accusation from others carrying a denigrating meaning, here is a glimpse of explicit mad positivity which anticipates that of today's Mad movements: 'Dear Sir, Excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth, and as I have not been for twenty dark, but very profitable years. I thank God that I courageously pursued my course through darkness.'¹⁰⁷ In this letter to William Hayley he not only expresses a positive aspect of 'madness', but also discusses the productive nature of journeying through the dark side of it... This is not a romanticisation of madness, but the positioning of it as something dangerous and painful but also containing capacity for profound and potentially joyful inspiration. This seems resonant with Sascha DuBrul's notion, discussed in an earlier chapter, of 'dangerous gifts' in madness that enable a mad person to see beyond the 'monoculture' of "normal" society and social relations. These are gifts 'Mad people have a responsibility to "cultivate" and "take care" of' as they lead to important forms of knowledge production, but also that come with pain and risk to the person possessing them¹⁰⁸. Again, in my own mind there is an excitement at a version of Blake in another timeline finding companions who had frameworks of thought like this which empower those who pursue their 'course' through darkness with the belief that this is something they should, or even must do...

... Of course, Blake largely held this belief without the support of peers who shared similar experiences, which as a Mad reader and a person who required this recognition and support to even tentatively begin exploring my own madness is one of his most

¹⁰⁷ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 138

¹⁰⁸ Seth Farber, *The Spiritual Gift of Madness: The Failure of Psychiatry and the Rise of The Mad Pride Movement* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2012) p. 219

remarkable achievements. However, his visionary interactions with Cowper show him finding some precedent, similar to that I find in him, for a positive position on madness even centuries before its current reclamation. In his annotations to Spurzheim's *Thought on Insanity* in which Spurzheim writes 'Whatever occupies the mind too intensely or exclusively is hurtful to the brain, and induces a state favourable to insanity, in diminishing the influence of the will', Blake's marginalia notes 'Cowper came to me & said. O that I were insane always I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane. I will never rest until I am so [...] You retain health & yet are as mad as any of us all – over us all – mad as a refuge from unbelief.' (E663) The fact that Blake responds to a text on insanity by hearing the voice of a deceased poet– one who was sent to one of the first asylums in the UK to treat mental distress as illness¹⁰⁹ – begging for Blake to make him properly mad in a sense that madness is desirable, is one of his most remarkable acknowledgements of his conviction that his madness was a strength, perhaps a conviction he could only fully commit to explicitly in writings he considered private such as this marginalia....

...The Mad reading I have of two of Blake's later prophetic works – *The Four Zoas*, and *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion* is one that is influenced by tracing similarities between Blake's lived experience of madness and how this influenced the poems with my own and others' experiences of moving towards a more steady belief in the importance of relating those experiences inwardly and outwardly. In tracing how retellings of the same or similar epic mythology develop across these two works, we can see how the multiple selves of Blake repeatedly encountered the themes that are

¹⁰⁹ < <https://cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk/william-cowper-1731-1800/> > [accessed 15/1/2023]

remarkably persistent across his work in new and developing ways. Though simplifying narrative arcs are against the way in which Mad experience disrupts the experience of time as linear, I tentatively suggest that a growing confidence in the meaning of mad experience and the worth of relating it artistically – even as this leads to an ever increasing complexity and contrariness and number of voices, even as it makes the work ever less accessible to critics trying to make rational or ideological sense of it – is what marks the difference between *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*...

...*The Four Zoas* is seen by many critics as in some ways the most ‘mad’, in the negative sense of the word, of Blake’s texts – as a failure. Erdman said it ‘is as mad as the effort to play croquet in Wonderland with living mallets and balls’¹¹⁰ while for Northrope Frye Blake failed to achieve whatever a ‘definitive vision’ might be. This has made it a site of fascination to other critics, who apply their own ideas to what the tumultuous, disorientating and often terrifying content of the poem and the sketches that Blake drew around it might represent, and feel that the textual versions by critics lose some of the poems’ ‘surface chaos’¹¹¹ of Blake’s unpublished manuscript, with its disorder seen as a catalyst for reaction in the reader, something I can agree with to some extent. This is the case for De Luca, for whom ‘the more palpably the visions interrupt or intrude, the more they endorse the possibility of fresh vision.’¹¹² For Ault *The Four Zoas* is ‘An inert nest of paradoxes, mistakes and non-sequiters’ which nonetheless should create a reaction in a reader who can manage their initial discomfort within this nest¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ David Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 294

¹¹¹ Peter Otto, *Blake’s Critique of Transcendence* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) p. 5

¹¹² V. A DeLuca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 115

¹¹³ Donald Ault, *Narrative Unbound: Re-Visioning Blake’s ‘The Four Zoas’* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press 1987) p.

However, both sides of this critical divide ultimately eventually ‘put forward the world forming imagination as the antidote to chaos’¹¹⁴ according to Peter Otto. To me the notion of the world forming imagination as ‘antidote’ to chaos is a misnaming of the effect the world forming imagination has in relation to ‘chaos’. For chaos encompasses not only the ‘void outside existence’ but the unbound imaginative response to it. If there is an example of a world forming imagination as an antidote to chaos within the text, it is the bounding effect of the way Urizen creates ways to ‘draw existence in’ (E314) in response to the ‘draught of Voidness’. It is Urizen and those who work under his energy who ‘formd and framd’ using the ‘golden compasses, the quadrant & the rule & balance’ to contain Voidness, to build the ‘mundane shell’ (E314)...

...Otto’s contention is that chaos in *The Four Zoas* is ‘a human creation, a product of the sublime turn from the suffering body’¹¹⁵ and that, in *The Four Zoas*, Blake ‘patiently analyses the pattern of relations that constitutes the chaotic, fallen body, so it can be recognised and embraced as our own. Only then’, according to Otto, ‘can the desire for transcendence and the struggle between the Zoas be replaced by the collective, embodied actions required for exodus.’¹¹⁶ For Otto, who acknowledges that in reading it in this way he creates his own version of an ‘absolute body’¹¹⁷, the focus of the poem is a patient critique of transcendental ideas expressed in the work of Locke and Young (whose *Night Thoughts* the poem has a profound intertextual relationship with as Blake used the back of his commercial plates for engraving the poem to write *The Four Zoas*).

¹¹⁴ Ibid p 5

¹¹⁵ Ibid p. 8

¹¹⁶ Peter Otto, *Blake’s Critique of Transcendence* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) p. 9

¹¹⁷ Ibid p. 17

Transcendence is a mechanism that Otto calls ‘recoiling from chaos’¹¹⁸ which I see as almost the opposite of what *The Four Zoas* represents to me, so in some sense I agree with Otto in that there is a critique of transcendence within the text. For me, *The Four Zoas* provides an example of how to incorporate the chaos of mad experience and the myriad ways through it and around it into an artwork, while also warning against ways to imaginatively create worlds that contain it restrictively, in the manner of Urizen as outlined earlier, rather than interact with it productively. Otto also makes the insightful observation that postmodern readings of the poem which eliminate any appeal within readings of the poem to ‘wider symbolism [...] allusions to other texts or to history’¹¹⁹ such as Donald Ault’s *Narrative Unbound*, readings that shift attention ‘to the reader’s creation of meaning’¹²⁰, themselves rely on a version of the sublime in cutting the poem loose ‘from anything outside its borders’. While I appreciate the effects this enables such readings to produce, they erase Blake the person, or the corporeal body through which the madness of the text lived...

... However, Otto himself is guilty of a desire to transcend the very apparent realities of Blake’s known life history and context in his own creation of Blake as a ‘patient’ analyst, the result of which forms *The Four Zoas*. In ignoring the way in which Blake in his own letters repeatedly mentions that he ‘received’ the writings, sometimes against his will – ‘I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation and sometimes even against my Will’¹²¹ and in ascribing the quality of patient analysis as the dominant mechanism of

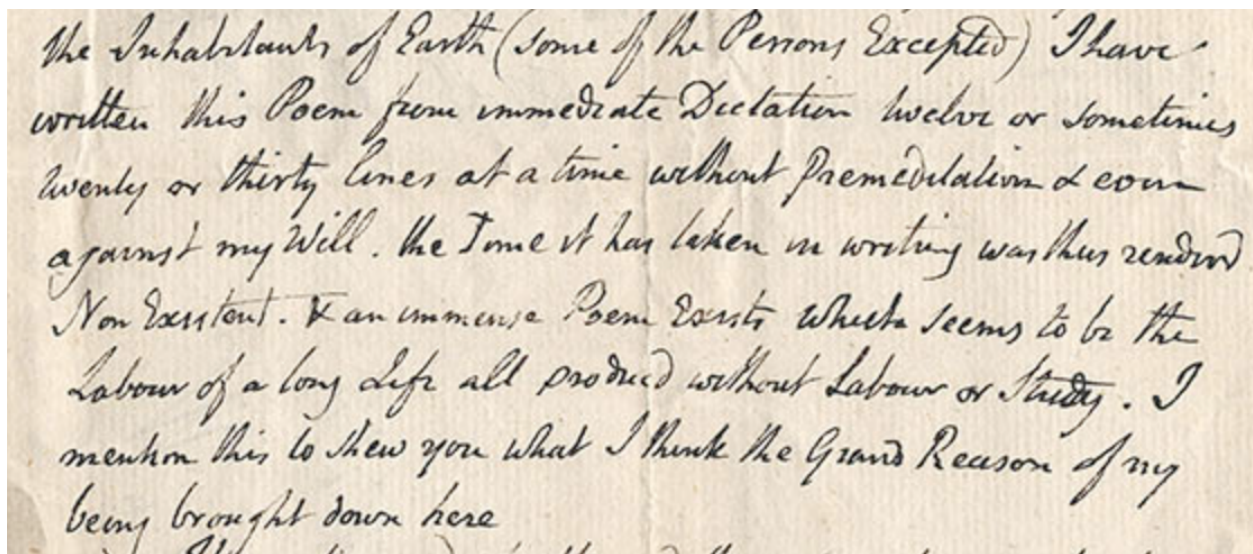
¹¹⁸ Ibid p. 8

¹¹⁹ Ibid p. 31

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 31

¹²¹ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p.85

generation to a text, something which Blake's own accounts contradict, he erases the quality of Madness from the lived experience of Blake and from the writing. This is not to say that *The Four Zoas* does not contain illuminating and insightful mythological representations of relations between forces, ideologies, mindsets and beliefs. It is just that there seems to be little biographical evidence that these stem from a patient and rational analysis. Choosing to ignore this evidence, and thus create an account of Blake and his poem that transcends the historical knowledge we have, to a significant extent undermines Otto's otherwise thorough critique...



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...*The Four Zoas* is the only one of his prophetic works we know of which Blake never decided to make public, though he mentions his work upon it in numerous letters (including the one referenced above). Reasons abound for this: most biographers note

¹²² < <https://blakearchive.org/images/lt25april1803.1.3.lt.100.jpg> > [accessed 17/1/2023]

that the period in which he was writing it was the one in which he was most oppressed by a sense, both in his external and internal worlds, that he was persecuted. To begin with there is the well documented incident of the accusation levelled against him by the soldier Schofield and the subsequent trial for sedition, which occurred in August 1803¹²³. A short verse in a letter to Thomas Butts reflects the bind that this version of Blake found himself in:

O why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look each one starts! When I speak, I offend;
Then I'm silent and passive and lose every friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, My pictures despise,
My person degrade ¶ my temper chastise;
And the pen in my terror, the pencil my shame;
All my Talents I bury, and dead is my Fame.

I am either too low or too highly priz'd;
When Elate I am Envy'd, When Meek I'm despis'd.¹²⁴

The accusations of Schofield and the subsequent trial certainly seem to have had a powerful effect on Blake, and made him less willing to express outwardly challenging views, or to advocate for revolution publicly. He is caught in a bind familiar to many mad and neuro-diverse people, and the poem encapsulates well an ongoing struggle that characterises many of our lives – how do you outwardly present a self that is

¹²³ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Minerva, 1995) p. 257

¹²⁴ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 95

accepted by society, when it feels so unnatural to do so; when selfhood itself seems a flimsy concept. If you speak the truths of your mad revelation, which often tear apart held certainties and societal norms in a powerful and uncomfortable way, you offend. When you are faced with these responses, the tendency is to withdraw in order to avoid very real persecution that arises as consequence to your madness. Or you try to contain the madness within a selfhood that acts like a mask you present to the world. And yet, when entering into the world of sane selfhood, you also enter the world of ego and egotism, and the subsequent potential to be harmed when this self is denigrated, seems to cause harm to others, or, in what appeared to hurt Blake most at points, ignored or neglected entirely...

...In his 1989 book length study *Madness and Blake's Myth*, Paul Youngquist explicitly ties the *The Four Zoas* to an interpretation based on Bleuler's conception of Schizophrenia. There is much of value to be found in some of the insights Youngquist explores via an acceptance of Madness as an etiological factor in the writing, rather than so many other critics who try to exclude the confounding variables which madness throws up to gain a stable picture of, for example, the narrative arc of the poem, or the static characteristics of the Zoas as archetypes. Youngquist rightly identifies that this misses the textural and linguistic details of the poem that are for me are such a fine illustration of madness, within which I can see likenesses with my own experiences both positive and negative. 'Sudden down fell they all together into an Unknown space/Deep horrible without End. Separated from Beulah far beneath/The Mans exteriors are become indefinite open to pain/In a fierce hungry void & none can visit his regions'(E312) is a good example of the disorientation, conjunction of physical/mental pain and self loss/annihilation that is a common aspect of my own

mad experiences and reflects those of others noted earlier, like Mary O'Hagan's description of a 'Black hole where there is only room for one'¹²⁵. Other sections have visionary climaxes which do the opposite, in which, creating out of the void or 'cold expanse where Tharmas mourns', the visionary figure of Los - who generally represents a belief in the value of the visionary productions of his mind though has far more complexity than this - sees 'the swords & spears of futurity' in a 'bright world of joy' world he acknowledges 'is in the Human Brain'(E306), thus demonstrating the mind's capacity to create itself out of voidness. However, we must then recognise then that the 'cold expanse' (E306) itself is a state of mind, even if one influenced by outside forces, or our perceptions of them...

...However, in his use of pathological conceptions of madness, Youngquist comes to a conclusion almost opposite to that of my conception of a Mad Blake – rather than one which urges us to embrace the madness within us as a part of a broader and more total humanity, Youngquist focuses on madness or rather what he calls "'Schizophrenia" the fundamental experience of madness in our modern world' as the negation of what it is to be human, of humanity¹²⁶. For him, 'Blake understood that madness defines our humanity – by *negating* it [Youngquist's italics]¹²⁷)...

...for Youngquist, 'The real subject of [*The Four Zoas*] is a form of madness that in many ways resembles what we call schizophrenia, whose fundamental symptoms Blake

¹²⁵ http://www.maryohagan.com/resources/Text_Files/Two%20Accounts%20of%20Mental%20Distress.pdf [accessed 8/1/2023]

¹²⁶ Paul Youngquist, *Madness and Blake's Myth* (Pennsylvania State University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989) p. x

¹²⁷ Ibid p. xi

renders with uncanny fidelity.’ He continues, ‘By making madness an artistic phenomenon, he masters it, securing health and renewed happiness by the margin of his myth.’¹²⁸ There is much to unpick in such a statement. Anachronistically labelling a figure with an already contested concept in this chapter – Schizophrenia and The Ancient Man - (though perhaps a concept less contested at the time Youngquist wrote his text than at the time I encounter it and his work, in the midst of my own madness and in the wake of mad pride and mad studies...) is at odds with the approach he outlines in the introduction to his book in which he admits the reductionism of clinical understandings as inadequate, and the conceptions of psychiatric diagnoses, seen as they are in a state of change over history, as still provisional understandings. However, something powerful about Youngquist’s work, and of use to a mad reading of Blake, is that, although his understanding of Madness is as an ‘Aberration of this mind’s life’ which ‘challenges our common humanity’¹²⁹ rather than a neglected part of a broader understanding of what is human more in line with the mad movement, he does advocate a focus on the way in which mad thinking should guide our understanding of Blake’s work and biography. We might now call ‘sanism’ the tacit assumption that Youngquist notes in literary criticism of Blake which refuses to name or seriously consider the influence of madness on the work on the basis that it ‘would discredit serious consideration of his poems’. Regardless of my difference with Youngquist in terms of his understanding madness as aberration or a challenge to humanity, Youngquist does open the door to a prolonged engagement with the influence of whatever ‘madness’ might be on Blake’s work...

¹²⁸ Ibid p. 101

¹²⁹ Ibid p. 3

...Youngquist pays tribute to the way that work such as that of Northrop Frye has saved Blake from literary obscurity, and reinvigorated interest in the work – as well as providing an incredibly detailed account and understanding of symbolism and meaning in Blake’s prophetic works – in some way the most mad of all his writing both formally and in terms of its subject. Yet for Youngquist, this focus on Blake’s writing as a hermetic achievement also cuts criticism off from what we know of Blake the man: ‘In Blake, [Frye] found a spokesman for human value and divine vision – a sane prophet, in other words, for an insane world. Frye’s Blake enters the world stripped of cantankerousness and eccentricity, a great artist of cosmology and a philosopher of the human spirit.’¹³⁰ For Youngquist, the pertinent question is whether the eccentricity of Blake’s experience, which in his own time led to the accusation of madness from his contemporaries, ‘deviated from the human norm’¹³¹. Powerfully, he suggests that ‘such a question does not incriminate the quality of Blake’s poetry. On the contrary, it opens new possibilities for criticism by re-evaluating what the poetry is about.’¹³²...

...Youngquist acknowledges that ‘many men and women at one time or another have visions, but unlike Blake, do not value them as literal facts.’¹³³ Although Youngquist is sympathetic to Blake’s idea that for those not experiencing the world in a visionary sense ‘in his opinion the deficiency was theirs and not his’, he as a ‘sane’ critic can’t bring himself to suggest that that might indeed be the case, as his own lived experience doesn’t resonate with this.¹³⁴ For Youngquist, Blake’s great achievement was that by

¹³⁰ Paul Youngquist, *Madness and Blake’s Myth* (Pennsylvania State University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989) p. 13

¹³¹ *Ibid* p.14

¹³² *Ibid* p.13

¹³³ *Ibid* p. 15

¹³⁴ *Ibid* p.15

making Madness the subject of his myth, he avoided the ‘disturbed experience of the world from becoming pathological’¹³⁵. In part, Youngquist accredits what he sees as Blake’s avoidance of the pathological to the historical moment in which he existed, in which a radical protestant tradition still held space for the literal visionary, while the secular poets, such as Shelley, understood visionary themes in terms of metaphoricity. However, understandings from the contemporary mad movement help us understand this in a new light – while Youngquist suggests this quality might ‘strike our modern minds as unenlightened’¹³⁶, many mad voices speak to understanding their visionary / psychotic experiences as both real and metaphorical – this represents, for example, the starting point for an investigation using the methods of the Maastricht interview for people who hear voices, experience strange beliefs or paranoia. In such approaches, far from the negation of humanity that Youngquist suggests constitutes Schizophrenia or madness, understandings are ‘based on the premise that hearing voices is a normal human experience that has a personal meaning in relation with life history’ which they ‘seek to understand.’¹³⁷ I would contend that this is something Blake evidently believed in, if not in such a linear relation, something that becomes increasingly clear in the later prophecies as more and more intermingling occurs between the visionary and the more mundane biographical, such as the aforementioned entry of ‘Skofield’ into Jerusalem, for example. The way in which the personal and the mythic interweave in Blake is also reminiscent of my own experiences of madness, and that of others...

¹³⁵ Ibid p. 15

¹³⁶ Paul Youngquist, *Madness and Blake’s Myth* (Pennsylvania State University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989) p. 16

¹³⁷ <http://www.dirkcorstens.com/maastrichtapproach> [accessed 18/11/2022]

... In his book *Outside Mental Health: Voices and Visions of Madness*, Will Hall, a psychiatric survivor who has run *Madness Radio* as a podcast over many years, collects together interviews with people who refuse to see their experiences of madness through a pathologizing lens. Anyone acquainted with Blake's poetry or letters will instantly be able to draw out parallels with the figures in these people's worldviews and understandings of meaningfully mad experience. I will provide a few examples here. In 'Body of Poetry, Body of Revolution' Eddie Bartok-Baratta describes his experience of his deceased brother living alongside and looking out for him in a similar matter of fact way that Blake relates his relationship to his own dead sibling. 'And so whenever I come out I know where I come from, and John comes with me. He was my best friend when he was killed. Some of my toughness is definitely communal; he is in me, he leaves a lot of love in me, he leaves a lot of ferocity in me. Just as I say that, I can see him sitting next to me and nodding his head with a cigarette the way he would, and saying, "Yeah, man, you tell 'em."¹³⁸ Over two hundred years before Blake spoke openly about similar experiences: 'Thirteen years ago I lost a brother, & with his spirit I converse daily and hourly[...]I hear his advice & even now write from his Dictate.'¹³⁹...

...In another interview, Arnold Mindell, a Mad physicist, talks like Blake about the potentiality within all of us to experience visionary states, and the necessity of those who have them to communicate them to the world:

People in extreme states frequently have magical or quantum-like phenomenon happen to them. Synchronistic, spiritual connections. People

¹³⁸ Will Hall, *Outside Mental Health: Voices and Visions of Madness* (United States: Madness Radio, 2016) p. 33

¹³⁹ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 43

have called that God. Today we don't understand this very well, so it is the job of people who go through altered states to learn how to bring these, what shall I call them, divine experiences or synchronistic experiences, closer to consensus reality. If you've had that experience, you also have the ability to eventually bring it together with everyday reality.¹⁴⁰

This is strikingly similar to Blake's understanding of his visions as important beyond himself, and not owned by himself: 'I have written this Poem from immediate dictation [...] without Premeditation & even against my Will; the Time it has taken in writing was thus render'd Non Existent, & an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long life, all produc'd without Labour or Study. I mention this to shew you what I think the Grand Reason of my being brought down here.'¹⁴¹ Mindell concludes his interview with an affirmation Blake would agree with: 'just don't think there's something terribly wrong with you. Consider the possibility that what's bothering you might be very meaningful, not just for you but for me and for all of us.'¹⁴²... we can see that, in the movement towards Mad positivity in activist and intellectual spaces, we are finding a ground that helps us locate my positive version of a Mad Blake as someone who, if born in our time, might have had contemporaries who more fully empathised with the way in which his art and madness had a fruitful if often painful and difficult relationship, a relationship without which the unique body of work that represents Blake's mad visions would not have been possible at all...

...Interestingly, Youngquist suggests in the conclusion to his introductory chapter that 'if Blake's biography reveals a potential for madness, nothing suggests that he he lapsed

¹⁴⁰ Will Hall, *Outside Mental Health: Voices and Visions of Madness* (United States: Madness Radio, 2016) p. 316

¹⁴¹ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p. 85

¹⁴² Will Hall, *Outside Mental Health*, p. 318. [note cut]

into it, even for a time.’ This fear of an admission of madness in Blake reveals the latent Sanism in society that, even as Youngquist lays some groundwork for breaking it down in his admission of madness into his analysis, still holds him back from understanding what a mad positive reading of Blake’s work can perceive – that many of the sections in Blake’s work appear carved directly out of an experience of madness similar to that which we see in ourselves as mad people – not one waiting or lingering as a shadow of potentiality, but rather as wave after wave of sensation and philosophical experience perceived as an onslaught of meaning which can’t be extracted into statements of rational sensibility...and that the direct representation of that as poetry and art and though *can* be valuable to our collective production of knowledge and culture. The label of or the actual experience of madness doesn’t, or at least shouldn’t, exclude something from that pan-human process of building knowledge and culture...

... One of the critical texts that comes closest to capturing the resonances I instinctively perceive between Madness represented via Blake in *The Four Zoas* and my own and my peers lived experiences of madness comes via Shoshana Felman in her book *Writing and Madness*. Though it is not a study on Blake, his presence figures powerfully, via George Bataille in the book’s opening: ‘One of Blake’s proverbs states that *if others had not been mad, then we should be*. Madness cannot be thrust outside of human integrality which, without the madman, would be incomplete.’¹⁴³ So, from its beginning, Bataille’s premise is that madness is part of the totality of human experience, which would be ‘incomplete’ without mad people. He goes on to describe a ‘a royal gift’ made of madness that a man ‘makes to his fellow creatures’ which, if accepted, is returned ‘with

¹⁴³ Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness* (Palo Alto: Samford University Press, 2003) p. 11

interest' which is 'the insanity of the one who receives the other's madness as a royal gift'¹⁴⁴ This is a rare critical acceptance of madness and the literary products of it as 'gift' in a way that suggests not only that madness should be welcomed as part of the aforementioned pan-human process of knowledge and culture building, but that in fact any culture or knowledge building that seeks to exclude madness is by definition incomplete! ...

...Felman follows on from Bataille to set out that the book aims to 'let the words of those who have made a gift of madness to us in their writing come into this book: may they take my place, think me'. Such a statement seems to take things a step further from critical approaches previously discusses – Felman is explicitly ceding control to the force of mad writing so it might act on and through her, in a way similar to how Blake channels madness 'even against his Will.' Though still positioning madness as something other's 'have been' and as a place that is 'not mine', thus meaning Felman's positioning is distant from my own Mad criticism which cannot locate madness as 'other' in the same way, this is a step away from an Urizenic urge towards control present even in Blake criticism that on another level seeks to disrupt monological logic, such as Miller's, Ault's or Otto's. Though Blake is not the subject of her writing, the books conclusion feels like it could be written about the Madness of *The Four Zoas*...

Madness, in other words (like literature), consists neither in *sense* or *non-sense*: It is not a final *signified* – however missing or disseminated – nor an ultimate *signifier* that resists exhaustive deciphering; it is rather, I would

¹⁴⁴ Ibid p. 11

suggest, a kind of *rhythm*; a rhythm that is as unpredicable, uncalculable, unsayable but that is nonetheless fundamentally narratable as the story of the slippage between the excessive fullness and the excessive emptiness of meaning.¹⁴⁵

... You can trace these excesses in all Blake's later prophecies, between fullness of meaning both in terms of how it might come across as concise in a traditional sense, and nonsensical at others, or in terms of the feelings it evokes through rhythm of these undulations, which is something quite different: the excess fullness of some passages might on the level of clarity appear empty, while sparse passages that feel empty on the level of rhythm might be easier to interact meaningfully with for a lot of readers, though not perhaps so much the Mad reader. Most importantly, and this is something Felman writes of her own critical book too, the 'narrative that, in its rhythm and its rhetoric, its theories and resistances, I would like to offer as a question – as a sign – to the interpretant to come'¹⁴⁶...

...In poems such as *The Four Zoas*, we don't find a mythological investigation of madness conducted forensically or proto-psychologically, even if it is possible to map such methodologies onto it. We find Madness speaking through Blake, whose belief in its inherent value led to him risking putting it onto the page uninhibited, whether for the public or for his selves we can't know with finality due to the fact he never

¹⁴⁵ Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. 254 [STANFORD?]

¹⁴⁶ Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. 255

published it. However, he did allude to it in correspondence, possibly suggesting at some point the intention was to leave it to 'the interpretant to come'. Whether the way in which Blake ended up revising and never publishing *The Four Zoas* is because this attempt at conveying madness, if made public, put him at too great a risk of 'sanism' and its consequences even in his time – the Blake's lived in close proximity to Bedlam, and as we saw earlier Blake was well acquainted with the fate of Cowper...whether he felt the project had failed to find a way forwards, whether it is indeed an intentional or unintentional maze of erasure and layered textual clues, or perhaps a record of one or a few iterations of Blake that reached a conclusion before new iterations wrote *Milton* and *Jerusalem*... whether it is any or all of this is something we can never be sure of. The enthusiasm with which he spoke of the poem in letters to Thomas Butts, with him suggesting it was the 'Grand reason of my being brought down here' suggested he felt the work was important, even suggests 'The Grandest this world contains'.¹⁴⁷ However, something meant that it never reached a public facing expression in the way other prophetic books did...

... One thing which is apparent within the text itself is an oppressive sense of the need to evade forces internal and external, and the development from the Lambeth prophecies of the already frightening Urizen (Ur – Reason/ / Your Reason) into a mythic representation of a multipronged threat that Blake felt deeply, from the state, from religion, from the natural sciences, from rational and empirical philosophy both external and internalised as part of the multifaceted body of the ancient man who on one level is all of humankind and on another is a mythic psyche. Critics have noted how psychologically this might have reflected what was going on his life, but I want to read

¹⁴⁷ *The Letters of William Blake* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Macmillan, 1956) p.85, 88.

passages of the poem from a mad perspective, in which madness contains important messages that help us move forwards in our own lives in multiplying selves, that act outwards on and into the world. To look at mythic evasion as a survival mechanism that enables us to escape subjectification in our external worlds even while they require us to present versions of our selves outwards that open us up to it ...

...that repeating Blakean obsession around selfhood and self-annihilation, alongside the risk of subjectification, permeates the warf and woof of *The Four Zoas*. Yet the versions of self-annihilation it contains, rather than the trickster like evasions of selfhood enacted in *The Marriage* which absents their authorship, or the later more salvatory accounts Blake moves onto in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, are at this point full of honesty about the distress involved in the mental processes of self-annihilation. The physicality of the poetry is striking – ‘Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul/Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax to dry’ – is one of the most powerful; metaphors of thought broadcasting, the feeling that others can see the inner workings of your mind, I have come across, making me relive my own experiences of this powerfully as I read it. The opening up of voids and abysses, that ever present risk of uncontained madness, is a repeated motif throughout the poem, and yet even more horrifying to the Zoas, emanations and other actors in the poem is that even when ‘A nothing left in darkness’ one still carries the burden of selfhood – ‘I am an identity/I wish and feel and weep and groan Ah terrible terrible.’ (E302). In this passage self-annihilation is discussed in more ambiguous terms, as a product of despair – ‘Despair will bring self murder on my soul’ ...

...yet selfhood itself is seen as an oppressive and corrosive force throughout the poem. Albion beholds 'his Sons/ Turning his Eyes outward to Self, losing the divine vision.' (E313) It is crucial to note here that selfhood is to do with looking outwards in the world of the poem – it arises as we become self-conscious in relation to how others perceive us. This is selfhood as a mask one is forced into by becoming a subject, or by fear of what it means to exist in the less ordered spheres of living without selfhood or exceeding its limits mentally. In many ways the closest thing to a selfhood which condemns one to mental distress, the one which allows the doubts to win out, that keeps the past versions of me stuck in the psych ward or dying by suicide, is the figure of the 'spectre' which Blake develops fully in *The Four Zoas* for the first time...

... But before this development even begins to unfold, the poem has an important revelation for us in the form of Los' speech in argument with his emanation Enitharmon: 'I see the invisible knife/ I see the shower of blood: I see the swords and spears of futurity/ Tho' in the Brain of Man we live, & in his circling Nerves./ Tho' this bright world of all our joy is in the Human Brain./ Where Urizen and all his Hosts hang their immortal lamps/ Thou neer shall leave this cold expanse where watry Tharmas mourns.' (E306). There are clear parallels here with *Paradise Lost's* Satan who proclaims 'The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.'¹⁴⁸ This notion of the mind being what colours external reality was one of the aspects of Milton's poem which most inspired Blake, and my versions of Blake are in clear dialogue with these ideas from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* throughout the remainder of his corporeal existence. And yet the statement from Los adds a layer of

¹⁴⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* < <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26/pg26-images.html>>

complexity to the concept. For in the world(s) of *The Four Zoas* the control you have over the mind itself is not complete, the multiple actors within it, and the mental warfare between them, mean that gaining control over it is not something within our grasp. Or perhaps it is, but then the aspect of gaining such dominion is a victory for the predominant threat within and without in the poem – Urizen. And as Blake repeatedly makes clear, though Urizen might live in our heads on one level, Urizenic thinking has very real consequences in the external world. The desire to categorise, to force certainties onto the world, to ‘mark’ everyone and everything with a category leads to the meat grinders of corporeal warfare, the ‘shower of blood’. But these effects of Urizenic systems in the outside world impact on the actions on the inside too, in similar ways to external displacements, losses, trials and successes impacted on Blake’s internal systems and mythology. The world’s of psychiatry and psychology are in constant battles over what causes madness, whether the internal dominates the external, whether the brain holds the power to change the world or the world and the trauma it inflicts has control over the brain. In *The Four Zoas* and the subsequent prophecies we find a mythic representation and exploration of these ideas which proceeds not according to ‘either this or this’ or ‘more this and less this’ but instead in terms of a Mad poetics that suggests ‘this AND this so This AND this AND this ad infinitum...

...The way in which *The Four Zoas* has been seen as the Blake text most suited to psychoanalytic readings, and indeed showing remarkable prescience in elaborating concepts that would not be articulated in psychology for another century, might also show why Blake left it alone. Like psychoanalysis, as a process of understanding madness, the poem provides a remarkable set of proposed insights into the workings of the mind, without offering as much hope of way to move forwards as later poems such

as *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*. But *The Four Zoas* provides a map of how to understand madness internally, before Blake created the later prophesies to turn this maddening outwards towards the world and us as a reading public...

... Urizen's argument with Los in Night the First of *The Four Zoas* goes on to suggest that 'The Spectre is the Man, the rest is only delusion and fancy'. Reading this as a Mad person, Urizen almost automatically becomes aligned with Psychiatry, or perhaps given Urizen's more expansive dominion over mental worlds and civilisation in Blake's mythology it would be better to say that Psychiatry is Urizenic as a discipline. Many in the Mad movement, or movements as we have already encountered earlier in this chapter, suggest that the encouragement to jettison what are deemed delusions by psychiatric systems cuts people off from a mode of living which, although life within those mental worlds it involves is often horrifying, also holds powers to turn those 'delusions' into paths of understanding or creativity that make the experience of madness less disabling,, or the identity of madness outgrow that of mental 'illness'...

...Yet what is so powerful about *The Four Zoas* as a poem is that it charts the full terror of Madness, as well as representing its power for world building in figures such as Los, the spectre themselves are a product of Madness. Enion's speech to her own spectre demonstrates the ability of a mental change, or an aspect of selfhood that is the shadow or spectre, to recolour the world in a way that flips all on its head. 'Love it changd to deadly Hate[...]I see the Shadow of the dead within my Soul wandering/In darkness & solitude forming Seas of Doubt & rocks of Repentance.'(E303) While in many ways quite an upsetting text to read for someone with significant mental health experience, it

also proves validating in the sense that it is powerful to see experiences similar to my own, and those of my peers, so honestly represented with the minimum filtering...

...A parallel in my own work - of Madness simultaneously creating escape from oppressive structures in human relations but also colouring, removing or making uncomfortable aspects of human nature that would appear most innocent or pure – can be found in the poems of my creative work, which document an unblinkered set of mad experiences across a corporeal lifetime in a non-linear progression, and without strong resolution into traditional notions of positive or negative, that I felt strongly inspired to write as I did by the way Blake writes in *The Four Zoas*. In the untitled sequence beginning on page 47, the blurring or interaction between inward and outward turned eyes (I's) is explored in the form of Mad experiences I had in which I believed I was personally responsible for human atrocities across the centuries. It is written in the italics that feature throughout the collection as ways in which the voices of Guardians, who - like the zoas, emanations and spectres and particular Urizen - often feel like external and threatening forces, or represent external or threatening forces, but also are to some extent integral to whatever overall voicing and concept of identity the poems has. The terror of these experiences is obvious in the writing, and yet they have their own method of meaning making, as disorientating yet unavoidable as Blake's spiralling and heteroglossic unfurlings in the prophetic works does:

*Now becoming a person,
as you realise the torture
and deride me as my hands
inflict the blows and feel
the pain not as abstracted ethics*

*but rather the imposition;
my stories laid over theirs;
a series of ink black bruises
and your voices barking
'trespass' every time I try
to perceive a life in the lee
of mutual destruction.*

...This sense of inevitable imposition of one identity upon another, of multiple narratives harming the integrity of individual ones, of a contrapoint but not counterpoint of voicing 'you, me, they' all aim at achieving what *The Four Zoas* does so well: accurately and succinctly expressing the experience of a terrifying madness without the inaccuracy-masquerading-as-accuracy that any reductionist clarification (beyond that which the mad experience presents itself) would create, any mundane shell built in fear of the limitlessness of mad experience that ends up being a force for oppression, a set of manacles, a stemming of the wellspring of sense for the sake of economy...

...yet the pillowy Beulah, the state of Eden we might hope for a result of escaping Urizenic oppression, is not opened up by madness, but rather experience comes at great cost. Enion's second soliloquy in the second night is a powerful account of the price of visionary Madness. One which seems to encompass and acknowledge the impossibility of the total absencing of selfhood while also existing in a body in the external world of systems that don't by default provide for the Mad. The 'price of Experience' or 'Wisdom' is 'all that a man hath his house his wife his children/Wisdom is sold in the desolate market when none come to buy / And in the withered field.' (E325) As we have already seen in letter and biography, Blake felt himself the desolation of relative

poverty and the sense that ‘none come to buy’ his works. But he would also have been very aware of the cost of madness to others, living in a time when ‘all that a man hath’ could so easily slip away when subject to accusations of insanity and treated according to the methods society in the day thought best to deal with it...

... Unfortunately for Mad people, this risk is still startlingly present today. My work for the NHS involves speaking to people within restrictive mental health settings, and I feel angered reading Enion’s speech at how relevant its stinging criticism still feels to those subject to the contemporary system, not just of mental health services but of a capitalism that was emerging in Blake’s time and still holds sway over the wider society of which the mental health system is a spoke. ‘It is easy to talk of patience to the afflicted / To speak laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer’ chimes so strongly with the experience of people in a mental health intensive care ward I currently speak to about their experiences of multi disciplinary team meetings in which their freedom is entirely contingent, in which, led by a consultant who one person said ‘felt like god’ often tell people they need to learn behaviours such as ‘patience’ and ‘prudence’ when nothing in their life’s stories has ever shown this to be of use to people like them, or which are perhaps impossibilities for them given the way their mind operates. Most powerful of all in Enion’s speech is the common Mad experience of being aware of the dark underbelly of society, whether we want to be or not, and the way we are told to ignore it or that being mentally in that way is sickness, which is explored so eloquently here – ‘Then the groan & the dolor are quite forgotten & the slave grinding at the mill / And the captive in the chains in chains & the poor in the prison, & the soldier in the field / When the shattered bone hath laid him groaning among the happier dead [...] Thus I could sing and rejoice, *but it is not so for me.*’ (E325) [my italics]...

...The porous boundaries between external and internal figures which so often features in Madness is apparent in the play between Blake's visionary forms here too, for as Ahania hear's Enion's lamentation it acts on her physically 'A swift Vibration/Spread thro her Golden frame.'(E325) Rather than consciously choosing to explore, she is rather 'drawn thro unbounded space/Onto the margin of Non Entity' where she perceives 'The Spectrous form of Enion in the Void/ And never from the moment could she rest upon her pillow' (E326). This passage has a striking relation to that in Night the First in which Urizen, also with his 'feet upon the verge of non-existence', subject to the 'mighty draft of Voidness to draw Existence in' begins to build the 'mundane shell' as a defense mechanism against his fear of the void, his creative act determined by the 'quadrant and the rule of balance' creating apparent order and safety while 'petrifying all the Human Imagination into rock and sand'(E314). Urizen is able to build a bower through authoritarianism that enables him to sleep 'on his couch' (E326) while his emanation has her blinkers removed by the encounter with Enion's spectre in the void beyond the bower. And Ahania, being subject to another's system (Urizen's) cannot gain such a peace...

...Those who systems do not serve are perhaps always condemned to sleeplessness, to these hauntings perceived in the void, but in those sleepless hauntings lay unfurling perceptions that undermine the structures which oppress them, however terrifying the experience of the haunting may be. I was inspired by this passage in *The Four Zoas* to explore some experiences of the psychiatric system in which a version of my selfhood has to be performed according to expectations of patience and prudence, but at the same time when a guardian figure, in this case acting in a way Enion's Spectre on

Ahania, provided both insights and escape from oppression on one level, and a stripping away of 'pillow' like comforts at the same time. This poem, titled 'Self-ish Marriquette' begins on page 64, and explores the way in which, to escape systems you have to on one level play their inherent game:

Stunted ventriloquism
as act of resistance;
mumbling tongue
strung to the audience's wishes

shaping the crushed up 'yes' required
for questions of sleep and appetite being 'good',
that 'good' so meek it keeps hope neat
and empty of energy, fight or flight.

...with this learned deception, familiar to many psychiatric survivors, you might engineer your discharge or escape, corporeally or just mentally, from a psychiatric ward. Yet it is accompanied by a necessary loss of innocence that threatens more closely valued ideas of who we are:

Missing closeness,
I reach out, but, as if
through clearing smoke, you see
the strings that shape my smiling lips sincerity,

you see the me you think you knew
grow hazy and, turning away,
feel the tug of a wire in your wrist.

Losing our grip on the self
deceit required of us in love
we fall apart.

...No further rest for the selves that this poem sets free, as there is no real rest for the forms and figures in the *Four Zoas*. Eventually even Urizen's sleep on the couch is transient, the basis for it proved over and over to be insufficient even if at the same time

a creating massive and seemingly completely domineering apparatus, so similar to psychiatric ideology...

*

...Another feature of the porous boundary between inner and outer I's that is explored extensively in *The Four Zoas* is the way in which inner and outer experience influence each other in very real ways. In night the second, as Urizen and 'The Bands of Heaven' begin the work of building 'the mundane shell' we are presented with Reuben and Levi, both now located in North Wales, undergoing some kind of traverse of this boundary – 'they behold / What is within now seen without they are raw to the hungry wind'. This sense again of the way the external shapes the internal and vice-versa is repeated in its most dramatic sense in Night The Fourth in which Los binds Urizen – and in doing so 'He became what he beheld' as he encounters the 'Shapes of enslaved humanity' (E336). This is fueled by Los' driving motivations being in part 'envy' and 'hate Eternal'. From this point begins a remarkable passage of the poem in which 7 ages of woe are linked to the tortured writhings of the eternal man. The raw madness of the text at this point feels startling – there is a numerical system to it and the physicality of it, the anatomical slant and the pain make it feel vivid and real, yet what exactly the passage means escapes any rational analysis. Rather, the passage moves us in a way that as readers we feel resonance with our madness, or are driven into a temporary state of madness if we have no previous experience of it, and the sense we make of it is all our own, or we write off the passage of as a production of madness itself which is seen as a failing or weakness in the work, as Erdman and others have when dismissing *The Four Zoas* as a product of

Blake's madness, rather than of Blake(s) him(them)self(ves). As if the two could be somehow be separated neatly, even when reaching backwards across centuries...

...my version of this version of Blake fails to find a satisfactory way to move past the poem because his belief in madness as a meaningful force does not at this point in his creative output lead to a subsequent sense of his mad life or lives being meaningful for others, but it does give a Blake the beginnings of an internal framework to provide 'madness as refuge from unbelief' (E663). It also helps him develop more thoroughly the notion of self-annihilation, but without the total evasion of absencing even his name from the text as we saw in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Instead, the interplay between these various Blakes' personal, spiritual, social and mythic lives begins to form the warp and woof of the writing in a way more fully realised in the later prophecies, that eventually enable him to declare outwardly in his older age in 1826 'Born 28 Nov 1757 in London & has died Several times since.' (E316) And importantly, the doubts that often plague the Mad, whether in the form of anxieties, strange beliefs, voices or visions that challenge our confidence in convictions, are integrated into a dialogical and unfurling framework for expressing them as part of a wider truth, rather than closing them down, opening up ways of thinking that will lead to the more confident Madness of Blake's later life, a madness that embraces its spiralling expansiveness, and yet also spiralling obsessiveness with 'minute particulars', getting locked into repetitive themes that return and return yet alter with each encounter. And these Blake's urge us to follow suit for the sake of our own salvation as a collective body, a collective Albion...

*

...if the reader, at this point, has already encountered my own creative work, then this spiralling circularity, this rapid expansion and contraction of aperture, of the voices in the poems, of the selves they represent, will hopefully be seen to be present there too. This existed as a feature of my madness, and my writing about my madness, long before my extended encounters with Blake. However, the selves that encounter the Blakes present in the later prophetic poetry then speak to the selves existing in times before those encounters, thus changing them, and charging them over and over, both in the legal and the energy potential senses of the word. This is how that boy in the bed comes to be raised above not just the duvet but the mundane reality of the ward to the extent that he threatens even the more recent selves that sent Blake back to save him, mirroring some of the dynamics between Los, Orc and Urizen in *The Four Zoas*, unbound energy then rebound then breaking free, then causing revelations and revolutions in the mind that then condemn themselves as they calcify into static certainties and lose the force of the poetic imagination, becoming scientific, priestly or simply too certainly self-ish...

...*The Four Zoas* provides a validation of a poetics which encounters without encapsulating these complex interactions between creation and grandiosity and dominion, between doubts and scepticism and their own path path towards egotism all in one place. To be able to make this madness turn back outwards in a more public facing challenge to the status quo requires the mad persons and personas to go through this dark night, or nine nights, these cycles of intense imaginative building and deconstruction, and for these to find a way to be represented without reductionism. My version of this version of Blake in part can't ever finish *The Four Zoas* because in one sense reductionism is inherent in the process of 'finishing'. And following Blake, both

the prelude and the envoi in my own creative work are more representations of the complex interactions acting in within mad thinking and biographies of madness, melodies and harmonies and dissonances of madness that pervade all the work in different ways, obsessions that occur as evolving motifs, than anything like an introduction or ending...

...I've been writing gradually more sanely from the start of this section, when 'I' - as multiple or absented, as metaphors heard as notes which admix selves together and erase them as new ones are born, or as self-annihilation - saved a body interned in a psychiatric ward from corporeal asphyxiation, or bleeding out. That body that the mind and the madness and selves live through, that forms the soundstage for the words that form poems and holds the gnarled fingers that push out thoughts as pen and ink and words that caterpillar their way across dirty screens...

...perhaps a way to depart with something like authenticity to the madness that constitutes that 'I' is to show my not so giant forms, those contained in madly scribed half poems that I received as if by dictation like Blake, and which interact with his own dictated selves that make up *The Four Zoas*...perhaps not just my past selves as waveforms but Blake's selves received by me reading his graver scratchings and modulated by my selves gasping and reacting might make up a new choir drawn upon the page...the following is my mad mind taking control of my fingers between breaks

from reading Blake's poem, white ink burning over the void like the fires and corrosive acids in hell's printing houses...

How to commit
that which
is both you
and multitudes

that stretches from shapeless
to coal black lineation
From minute particular to
grand sweep of story
that crumbles in all like a story,
blind to the outside
even when it turns to face it
directly.

I
practice evasion so
I can escape
you who are all evasion.

escaping the pen
even as you push it
over the pages

history unrolling
polyphonically — unbecomingly
self-annihilation — selfhood

You hide me because
society taught you so

You hide me
as it keeps you
safe from knowing

You hide me
so you can keep on wearing
a cloak

You wear me
like a cloak
I keep you safe

You wear me
when it's suits you

You undo me
knowing we joined at parts

Destroys the dearest things
the things that keep us
suspended

Tongues hang in aspic
Ears filled with foam

eyeballs pinned to one point
so they don't meet
our selves

in ways that risk
all being

or is it
being all...



Is this all a defense?

Or is that the grasp of Urizen
Closing the door of perception

Psychology is a key
but is it locking the door
or setting us free?

History points to its place
in the south,

blazing down on
bodies denied shade

but is shade a function
of Beulah.

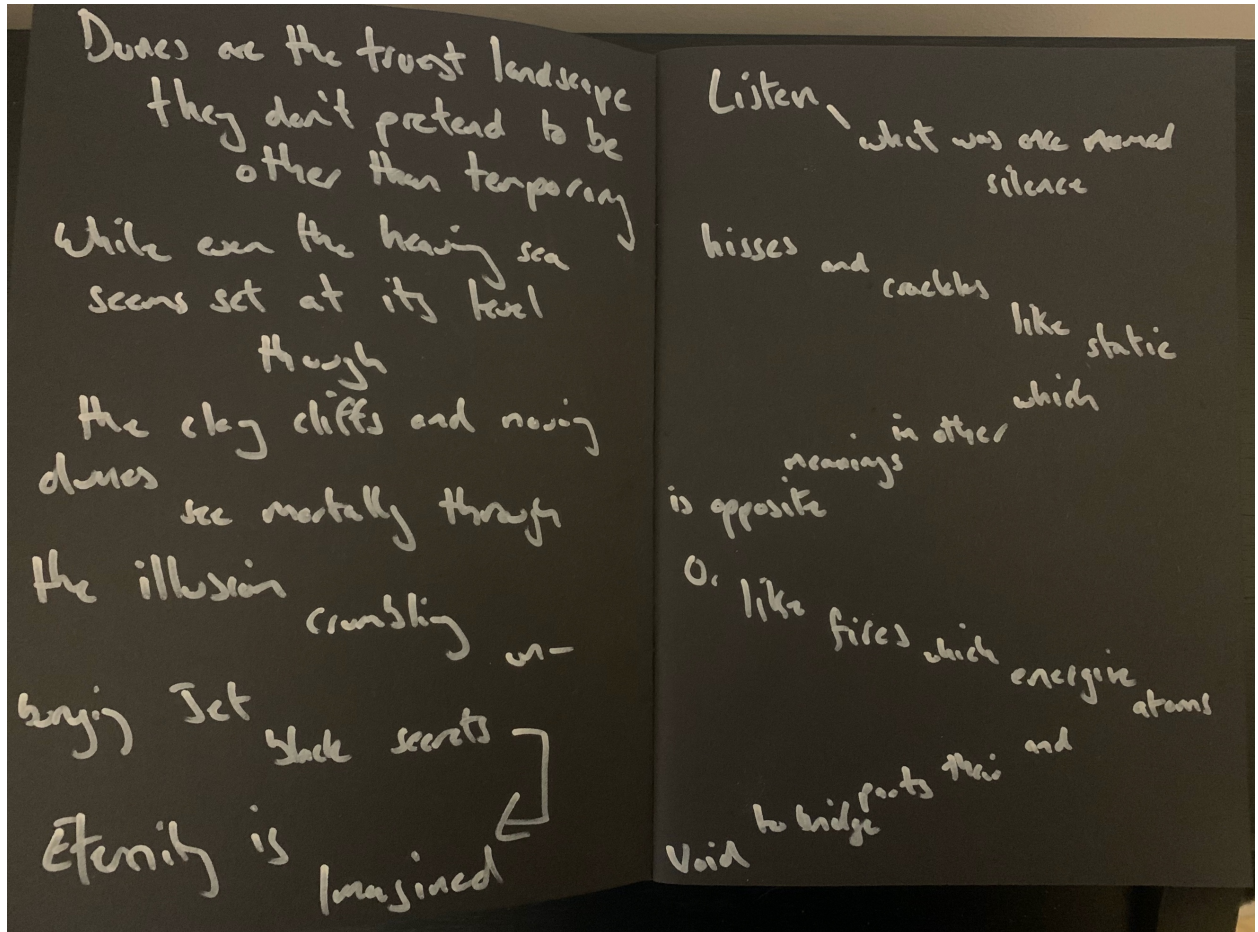
Is Beulah sitting here
half warm

Turn between speaking and suffering
and silence.

Is silence the way we can
grow this, learn to this seed
or simply illusory freedom?

No!
because, tearing down the self
you are never free from the
forces you turn against
yourself

your self existing
even as a shadow,
the shadow enveloping
a self, a still,
a space to call your own -
a home



Appendix A: Marginalia as a Mad Form of Critical Engagement

... With the speed and, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the moment(s) at which you catch it, unpredictability of a Mad mind's encounters with an idea, it is not surprising that the essay or critical piece of writing is something that is a) difficult for the Mad mind to engage in the production of and b) is something which the Mad mind struggles to represent itself well within. Unlike Romantic near contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, Blake was not a producer of critical essays or appraisals of the work of others, nor a writer of philosophical treatise or autobiographical explorations. Those public manifestos or statements of intent that do exist, exist in the largely in body of his verse and illuminated books, not as a separate body of work, with the exception of prospectus to exhibitions and adverts, which read awkwardly and cantakerously, as if Blake's unable to contain or untangle the strong feelings that accompany or inform his more theoretical or ideological statements. For example, the *Descriptive Catalogue* which accompanied his unsuccessful exhibition in 1809 contains diatribes against the 'villany' of the entire Flandrian School of painting, while discussing in the plain language of someone for whom such things are an everyday reality visionary journeys to ancient Asia in which he drew inspiration for his works, which he unembarrassedly suggests should be held in the same esteem as 'those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity' (E530) ...

... These verbose, grandiose and at points dramatically totalising statements may, in part, be due to the lack of formal education Blake received, and his being an outsider to the world of the universities in which such skills might be learned, but which Blake say as producing 'Hirelings' which 'depress Mental and prolong Corporeal war' (E95).

Many critics ascribe to some degree the unconventional nature of his writing to this unconventional (at least, unconventional for a poet who's gained lasting fame from that period) upbringing. And yet, as a Mad person struggling to represent my thoughts and justify their meaningfulness in institutional spaces whose accepted modes of knowledge discourse would seem to exclude them, I see another issue that may well have also affected Blake...

... With madness can come a cacophonous barrage of ideas, visions, voices into which the Mad person can approach in varied ways. They can try to dampen, dismiss or deny the experiences - with limited success judging by the poor outcomes of the Mad-treated-as-ill even as assessed according to the standards of the fields that seek to solve Madness's puzzles and pains. Or they can try to communicate them or the experience of them as best they can, often through metaphor and language so dense and disorientating others see this communication as senseless, even if, for Mad peers, such language is often relatable. Or language that seems so grandiose and riven with raw emotion it is dismissed as somehow uneducated, primitive or unbalanced (with whatever balance is held up as a de jure feature of good critical writing as much as it is seen as a feature that distinguishes 'sane' thought from the madness that haunts it...). This breakdown in communication is what Seikkula, one of the founders of Open Dialogue as a mental health approach describes as 'a temporary, radical, and terrifying alienation from shared communicative practices: a 'no-man's land' where unbearable

experience has no words and, thus, the patient has no voice and no genuine agency'¹⁴⁹

...

... requiring that Mad thinkers communicate their thoughts in modes based on an idealised form of Sane thought might therefore not only be discriminatory, in the sense that scholars of Mad studies have started to define the term with reference to the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable academic discourse based on a notion of coherence and rationality that by its nature excludes Mad thinking [ref]; it may also deny or stifle the emergence of new ways of engaging with the world, and with texts of and about the world(s) they exist in. Blake's letters, marginalia and annotations, as well as the way in which he brings criticism of others ideas and work directly into his poetic works and integrates them into his mad mythology, provide an example of a critically engaged Mad person in dialogue with the ideas of his time and of eternity, and representing them in a manner that reflects the sometimes aphoristic, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes emotive and physically affecting ways in which mad minds interact with the thoughts and ideas of others. This dialogical mode of encounter seems to me to provide a richer account than one in which critical distance is then established as a default position and one's emotional and intuitive responses are either excluded or hidden behind a language of rational discourse, or a sense of tying together contraries in the form of arguments that are won or lost. *This is an Urizenic mode of world building, each essay is an inward-looking globe, however outward looking its content, mad writing is the*

¹⁴⁹ Jaako Seikkula and Mary Olsen, 'The Open Dialogue Approach To Acute Psychosis: Its Poetics and Micropolitics' *Family process*, 2003, Vol.42 (3), p.403-418 (p. 409)

reverse, the content looks inwards so it can more truly face outwards in the form of a dialogue uniting inner and outer spheres...

... I am not suggesting that Blake's marginalia alone constitute a critical piece of work comparable to more detailed or rigorous studies, though the reprinting of it in successive editions of Blake's complete and collected works certainly suggest that editors and critics see a value in it. It is more that I find in it an emotional honesty which I find refreshing to read as a mad person for whom emotion often completely colours the world, or whose world is often completely coloured by dialogue with the ideas of others. Blake will often proclaim agreement or find resonance with his own mad mythology, and simply state, such as in his annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms*, his immediate response, sometimes in praise, sometimes in anger: 'Most excellent' or 'Gold' or 'Uneasy' (E584). Other times he tests the ideas against those he derives from his own experience, and the importance he places upon said experience as a direct way of engaging with the world(s). A poignant picture of how the Sanism of Blake's day made him feel may be deduced from his response to aphorism 619 – 'Be assured then, that to know yourself perfectly you have only to set down a true statement of those that ever loved or hated you' to which Blake wrote 'Uneasy because I cannot do this', showing how uncertainty and suspiciousness of those around him (often with good reason) meant Blake felt unstable in his giving and receiving of love (E599). At other points, such as his responses to Reynolds, he uses the dialogue to refine and form his own philosophy in opposition to the writing he is engaging with: 'The Man Either Painter or Philosopher who Learns or Acquires all he Knows from Others, Must be full of

Contradictions' (E639). It seems Blake did not need to meet a person to debate them but the way the marginalia are written suggests him encountering the writers as living participants in his dialogue as well as in text, having visionary conversations with the figures the text brings into his minds eye...

...That Blake believed the marginalia more than just notes to himself is also evident; in the conclusion to the Lavater book he wrote: 'I hope no one will call what I have written cavilling because he might think my remarks of small consequence For I write from the warmth of my heart, and cannot resist the impulse I feel to rectify what I think false in a book I love so much, and approve so generally...' (E600)...

... My own reading and thinking around madness and of mad writers (or writings which I find some similitude with my own Madness within) follows a similar pattern, with Mental Fight, felt revelations and instinctive reactions or digressionary flows of thought pouring from my pen into the margins or the notebooks I keep beside me as I read. Interestingly, I think that my marginalia to accounts of Blake's life and critical studies of his work, as well as to his work itself, is where I have built the fullest picture of my Mad Blake; a Mad Blake of mine in dialogue with the differing Blake's put forwards by historians, Urizenic modernists, nationalists, the list grows onwards...

...It would be a daunting and perhaps inappropriate to this project's bounds to collect all the marginalia unfettered via scans or reproductions of it, as it would run to several book lengths is presented in the context of the texts it is in dialogue with. However, some of the force of this marginalia will probably make itself felt in subcurrents running

through the main body of critical text, some will undoubtedly appear in the form of poems interspersed with quotes that speak with them and the poems speak to. The annotated bibliography also contains not just critical analysis but personal and immediate responses to some of the texts contained in it, in a way that hopefully lays bare some of the operations of the mind and selves that find their way through this text, and which finds its selves through them...

Annotated Bibliography

This bibliography is partitioned off from the main body of the work as an aesthetic decision, but one in turn informed by a desire, as stated in the introduction, to bring the critical work closer to representing my lived experiences of madness. Often insights come drifting in and out of madness - sometimes chaotic fragments, sometimes fully formed philosophical ideas – that bear similarity to the thoughts of thinkers both present and past. When reading such writing recollections of such insights might resonate or chime. Occasionally this resonance creates in turn new frequencies of thinking that I have woven into the main text. However, it feels disingenuous to bring resonances with those thinkers they align with without creating something new into the centre of the work, when they had no place in the immediate experience or development of the mad thought or thinking. This is why I relegated this to the appendices, in a practice influenced, as stated, by Blake's own critical responses to the thinker of his day, which are available to us predominantly through marginalia rather than critical essaying. I suggest this is because he too gives primacy to the unfolding of his thoughts out of direct – I suggest Mad – inspiration in his main body of work...

Ackroyd, Peter. *Blake* (London: Vintage, 1999)

· Ackroyd's Blake is very much his own, and like Sinclair (and myself to some extent) he doesn't appear to see this as an issue. Importantly, Ackroyd recognises what might be described as Blake's madness as 'the true soil of his genius' and notes that periods of stress intensified his visions, but that these stressors were not 'triggers' of 'hallucinations' but rather inspired the flowing forwards meaningful and powerful

‘eidetic imagery’. Ackroyd makes clear Blake’s painful obscurity and reputation as ‘wild’ in his own time. But also Blake’s conscious embrace of wildness as a way to avoid what he saw as a harmful drive towards uniformity in thought and art that threatened humanity itself: ‘A secular society is a society which creates “the ratio” of all that exists and calls it knowledge’. Ackroyd also uses numerous sources to verify that the general opinion of Blake in his own time was as a Mad person, but it is also interesting that he suggests that the ‘oddities’ which his contemporaries saw as limiting (and were, in a sense of his integration into the society as an artist...) were actually intrinsic to the uniqueness of his visions and understandings. However, despite this, Ackroyd still seems to try to distance Blake’s work, even if acknowledging his mental struggles, from Madness, as if it would invalidate his work and his genius to do so. In his discussions of the later work he insists on emphasising moments of clarity - over the bulk of the work which is disorientating and complex - and states that the poems aren’t actually hard to understand – ‘He is only a difficult poet if we make him so.’ (p. 295). Yet, later, he states that ‘after two hundred years, [*Jerusalem*] has yet to be properly understood.’ (p. 338)

Bion, Wilfred R. *Cogitations* (London: Karnac, 1992)

· I looked at Bion due to his sometimes perceptive understanding of aspects of the mind described as a ‘schizoid’ position as productive, even if he sees them in the psychoanalytic sense as pathological in other ways. *Cogitations* is interesting as in some ways it is ‘The Red Book’ of Bion, in that it is more to do with personal explorations and experiences than any attempt to make a contribution to an overarching theory of psychoanalysis. Formed from personal reflections and questions, small essays and fragments, the experience of reading it is to enter into a dialogue with ideas and

concepts which Bion opens up but rarely closes by means of drawing reductive conclusions in the way that more formal psychological work can often do.

Blake and The Argument of Method ed. Dan Miller, Mark Bracher and Donald Ault
(Durham: Duke University Press, 1987)

This book is an impressive collection of works applying method – in the sense largely of literary or psychoanalytic theory – in order to open up new readings of Blake. Stephen D. Cox's piece 'Methods and Limitations' is of some interest in pointing out limitations of criticism via method which are relevant to mad and self-annihilating or proliferating reading(s) such as those I attempt– 'any conceivable method[...] can acquire practically complete explanatory power in the eyes of those who deploy it with complete confidence.'(p.23). Cox notes that 'the safest prediction about any new commentary on [Blake's] works is that it will argue uncompromisingly against "reason" and that its argument will emphasise its own superior rationality' (p. 27) Both of these criticisms are something that I am actively trying to avoid in creating my own text that forwards a Mad reading of Blake, and I hope is achieved. By not being written from a stable sense of selfhood or firm single voice, by sometimes drawing on the grandiosity of mad experience and sometimes drawingt upon the part riven with doubts, I hope it is clear that this work is a plea for admission of these readings of Blake and of Madness onto him and through him alongside all the other readings and many other Blake's, not for an assertion that this should usurp the others...s

Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970)

- Copy of the illuminated version of the poems. Used for the close reading of 'London'.

Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988)

- Used for textual analysis of the poems and prose and sometimes consulted for the included commentary by Harold Bloom, though his views differ vastly from my own. Where possibly I have used the illuminated versions in discussions of Blake's work, but this is a handy 'bible' to carry with me when I can't access the Blake Archive.

Churton, Tobias. *Jerusalem: The Real Life of William Blake* (London, Watkins Media, 2014)

- Churton's claim to write 'the real life' of Blake is spurious to say the least. Churton seems keen to own a version of Blake, but his is to the exclusion of others, unlike Ackroyd for example, who tacitly acknowledges that his version is only one of many. He draws heavily on Yeats and Raine to construct a notion of Blake as a guru with a big focus on Blake as influenced by Gnosticism (an area Churton clearly feels an affinity with himself and is a researcher in). He does do good work on understanding that the religious landscape of the time was far less polarised than suggested by, for example, E. P. Thompson. He also points out that 'the age of reason' was not the dominant discourse for the average person, for whom religion and occult ideas such as 'emblem

books' were as likely to influence their world view as Newton or Bacon. He also discusses other contemporary movements at the time such as the Illuminists as influencing the suspicious attitude Blake held towards enlightenment thinkers. He is at his best when discussing Blake in relation to his own areas of expertise, such as Boehme's work, alchemy (see Jung!) and also the germanic philosophical landscape, where Churton believes Blake's genius would have been recognised. The most interesting observations about madness actually come when he is not discussing it as such, but rather discussing the need to adhere to social norms for acceptance and Blake's refusal to do so: "The enquiry in England is not whether a Man has talents and Genius. But whether he is Passive and Polite and a Virtuous Ass: and obedient to Noblemens opinions in Art and Science. If he is; he is a Good Man: If not he must be Starved". This idea of social conformity being a prerequisite for an artist or thinkers work being judged as of merit is crucial to how Mad thought is discredited too.

Cooper, David. *The Language of Madness* (London: Penguin, 1978)

· Cooper is a key figure in anti-psychiatry who focused on the way in which Madness communicates or is communicated, as suggested by the title of this book. Some ideas are very powerful for their resonance with my developing understanding of my madness and also that of Blake. He describes madness as the 'destructuring' of the alienated structures of existence he aligns with psychiatric diagnosis and the acceptance thereof – an othering of the self(ves). He talks about the need for madness to speak with its own voice, not through those inserted by society or psychiatry, and how fundamental the arts are as a platform where this voice can exist with less immediate censure. However, by drawing largely on his own, philosophically informed voice, he

himself silences to some extent the voices of the mad he is trying to set free. Tellingly, he says there will be no need for madness in its own language, something that only someone who has the privilege of never having experienced what it is to be Mad in society could say, much like the white person who says they 'don't see colour'. He urges against the romanticisation of madness and for the urgent politicisation of it, but then claims madness for his own socialist position – one I have sympathy with but disagree with its having 'ownership' of Mad thinking, especially when this ownership is assumed by an – albeit radically inclined – psy-professional. In this way he is much like Laing.

Damrosch, Leo. *Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015)

· This later work on Blake by Damrosch is more comfortable with some of the contradictions in Blake's symbolism than his earlier work, and also allows more biographical and historical detail to inform its picture of Blake's imaginative world. He embraces the term 'eidetic visions' to distinguish Blake's experiences from madness, but in a sense this is a way he can gloss over the chaos and madness that haunted his earlier work on Blake. He is more insightful when looking at ideology and Blake's perceptive treatment of its internalisation, comparing 'mind forg'd manacles' with Steve Biko's statement that 'the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed'. He notes that Blakean proverbs are really anti-proverbs as they don't convey truisms but rather collapse them. Does this make them Mad proverbs par excellence? Not for Damrosch, who doesn't mention their madness at all. However, he does make reference to Youngquist's work, and to some extent throws his lot in with him, agreeing that deep

psychological disturbances characterise much of Blake's work in a negative sense – especially in 'The Four Zoas', and quoting Blake's fear of those who 'Mock with the aspersion of madness'. Yet to me what Blake feared was that this aspersion discredited his thought, not that his thought wasn't what someone from a contemporary Mad studies position might describe as Mad in a positive light. Madness is considered more positively later in Damrosch's book though, where he draws comparison between Blake's 'madness as refuge from unbelief' in his vision of Cowper, and R. D. Laing's description of Schizophrenia as a 'successful attempt not to adapt to pseudo-social realities'. Damrosch's earlier works position of scepticism with regards the possibility of self-annihilation in *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* replaced with something like a longing for it in his conclusion: 'Blake urges us to put aside preoccupation with self and learn to be.'

Damrosch, Jr, Leopold. *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980)

· An early Damrosch book on Blake. He is a thinker along the lines of Frye and Yeats in his desire to find an overarching symbolic system in Blake, rather than to contextualise him historically, but finds inherent contradictions within Blake's symbolism. In this book he tries to understand the utility of these contradictions, with the risk, seemingly, of his Blake being charged with Madness if these contradictions aren't resolved or explained. This seems to have become a bit of an obsession for Damrosch, with his later work *Eternity's Sunrise* trying to resolve what he unearths here. He ultimately derives an opinion that Blake's figure of Los is trapped in the ambiguity of having to create meaning from chaos, but for Damrosch this system is

doomed as ‘a central lesson in Blake is that chaos can only create chaos; nothing will come of nothing’. This position is challenged if we accept that chaos and void are not nothing but something integral to the mad understanding of the world Blake’s poetry is born of, a substrate rather than a nothingness on which Blake’s Los ‘Strives with systems to deliver from systems’. Damrosch’s difficulty in accepting concepts easily admissible to Madness (and also a large part of society these days), such as androgyny as a valid mode of being rather than something Damrosch describes as ‘constantly frustrated by reality’, or of living in contrary states that Blake sometimes inhabits but Damrosch sees as a ‘doomed campaign against the pressures of dualism’, tell us as much about Damrosch’s personal prejudices as they do about the failures he perceives in Blake’s symbolism.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus* trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004)

· Deleuze and Guattari’s landmark work has been a huge influence on my understanding of my own madness, and also latterly my readings of Blake. Though I take issue with some of the nastiness with which they discuss ‘the schizophrenic’ – in a way, that is, that sometimes makes the schizophrenic experience seem primitive but the insights they gain from the study of it valuable, rather than assigning intrinsic value to madness – still at points their writing closely mirrors my experience of madness, something that few non-poetic works manage. The non-linear nature of thought, the mistrust of selfhood as a desirable state of stability, the understanding of breakdown in figures such as Nietzsche and Artaud as ways of also breaking through, without Romanticising them or diminishing the reality of their suffering all spoke to me as a

young person trapped in the psychiatric system and helped me rediscover the meaning in my rapid and violently evolving mental experiences. I think the concept of the Rhizome as opposed to Arborial structuring has a lot of validity in understanding Blake's methods 200 years beforehand, the necessity to violently de-centre and their refusal to retreat to a panoptical position as well as the intrinsic value they ascribe to the 'minute particulars' of experience helped me read madness as potentially valuable and productive in the same way as Blake's poetic works.

De-Medicalising Misery II ed. Ewan Speed, Joanna Moncrieff and Mark Rapley
(Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014)

· A collection of essays from the contemporary world of critical psychiatry and psychology, social work and Mad studies, which seek to reconfigure understanding of Mad experience away from pathology and towards it being an understandable reaction to the realities of neoliberalism and western psychiatric and societal trends. The book includes the voices of those with lived experience of Madness but is dominated by psy-professionals, albeit those critical of the dominant trends within their profession. It is at its most valuable when explaining how psychiatrization silences the voices of those deemed 'mentally ill' and in its perceptive analysis of how forces traditionally opposed to psychiatry are co-opted by it to maintain its power, such as organisational restructuring of ideas from the Recovery Movement. This mirrors the way in which Deleuze and Guattari see Capitalism encircling and commodifying pockets of resistance to it and using them to modify the form of capitalism without changing its central mechanism of operation. It also reflects the Blakean way in which Urizenic power is challenged but then re-established by Los-in-creation, and the paradoxical need for the

‘fallen’ world to find its salvation within the fallen landscape, rather than some fanciful utopia external to its flux, ebb and flow. The book draws on valuable research that suggests that ‘psychotic’ experiences may be reactions or responses to trauma, but it is rather dogmatic in its psychological gaze which suggests that these things need working through to re-establish some sort of normality, something understandably desirable to many and myself at points, but which to some extent denigrates the messages in the madness in a way that more radical approaches from Mad Studies led by people with lived experience, such as the Hearing Voices Network and Mind Freedom International, don’t.

Derrida, Jacques. ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’ in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. 31-63

· Derrida’s dialogue with Foucault’s work on Psychiatry not only throws up challenges to Foucault but to myself as someone wanting to write madly in language, which as Derrida points out could be seen as impossible. He points out that Foucault want’s ‘madness to speak for itself’, but that the language of classical reason is still the language by which the book is written. Is Blake somehow more able to write madness by using poetic form? Later Derrida talks of how Foucault talks of madness as ‘silenced’ and this forming the basis of psychiatry imposing or acting as an interlocuter, eventually making the statement that ‘the history of madness is therefore an archaeology of silence’. Yet can one even write an archaeology of silence without borrowing from the ‘juridical province of interdiction?’. Yet this assumption of an absence, a silence as mad is itself an assumption. Mad culture exists, and it does so partly using the language of reason and therefore ‘reiterates the crime’ as Derrida would put it. But madness, in

Blake and in other writings, and in the experiences of the mad whose speech or thought is termed 'disordered', actively uses the language of reason against reason, breaking its rules and shattering its claims to objective truth in its mad use of signs and signifiers, or its collapsing at points of the distinction between the two. Perhaps this is what Blake hints at when he talks of the Cogito in Descartes as being named so as to restrain its hyperbole or excess. Derrida concludes that the 'relationship between reason, madness and death is an economy, a structure of deferral whose irreducible originality must be respected'. Philosophical writing is therefore conducted in 'the confessed terror of going mad' but by its own rules 'reason is madder than madness' for it dodges 'the wellspring of sense' that is madness in order to establish its economy (p.62). I think there are interesting links between what Blake writes, which recognises this 'wellspring of sense and opens the work up to it' and his poetry as Mad. I think the necessity of economy for Derrida is an inability himself to open himself fully to this wellspring due to his confessed terror, but that his condition is not universal, the Mad embrace the wellspring, perhaps by necessity.

Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003)

- This book, which opens with Bataille's direct reference to Blake – 'One of Blake's proverbs states that *if others have not been mad, then we should be*' and which continues to quote Bataille saying that 'Madness cannot be thrust outside of human integrality which, without the madman, would not be complete' feels important as an attempt to critically locate the productions of madness as positive and perhaps essential, as well as to locate them within our common humanity or 'human integrality'. Felman goes on to invite in the mad via their texts - following from Bataille's notion that 'the gift a man

makes of his madness' acts on the reader in the sense that it is 'returned with interest' which is 'the insanity of the one who receives the other's madness' – 'may they take my place, think me.' This feels like an important admission that in part the purpose of mad texts, the the correct approach to them is not to try and decode them by method, but rather to act on the reader, for the reader to be mad by the text, and that this maddening is 'a gift'. Felman goes on to make the distinction that 'others have been mad' and locates her book as an effort to construct a theory of 'their [the Mad's] place in us' thereby positioning us as readers, and herself, as 'other' to madness and mad people. But in admitting that through the Mad who have been so 'in our place' are intrinsic to humanity, and that a part of madness, via the mad, and especially through encounter with their ways of relating madness artistically, been everyone has a 'living relationship' to a place of madness, is emancipatory. There are the grounds for a nascent mad positivity within literary theory that goes beyond what she describes as 'caricature' of madness or 'an inflation on discourses on madness' influenced by 'the marketplace of fashion'. In Felman's opinion, the task is less to answer what is madness, which always carries reductionist overtones, but rather to put madness and literature, and literary acts into dialogue with one another, to see how they act upon each other with *both* as active participants. 'this book would like to constitute a renewal of literary studies and to explore, by listening to the speech of madness in the literary text, new modes of reading and new modes of apprehending what is fundamentally at stake in the peculiar thing called literature. '.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilisation* trans. Richard Howard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001)

· Foucault's first big attempt at creating his 'grand narrative' around psychiatry, madness and the power structures they affect in civilisation has been instrumental for anti-psychiatry and for the Mad movement. Yet often, in this early work, Foucault is too eager to make the sweeping statement and too meager with historical accuracy around basics, such as defining eras of 'great confinement' which others have pointed out don't match up to records. But where Foucault is most impressive is in his articulation of the complex web of factors that lead to psychiatry – and psychiatrists – being granted a thaumaturgical position which it doesn't itself quite understand, but which leads to the dehumanisation, devaluation and invalidation of so many people's life experience. This dehumanisation and the injustices it perpetuates are shockingly illustrated at many points throughout Foucault's book. Perhaps David Cooper, in his introduction, was right in suggesting that 'the true significance of his book resides most precisely in the terror it may produce in a significant few of us.'

Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974* ed. Jacques Lagrange, trans. Graham Burchill (New York: Picador, 2006)

· In Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France between 1974-1974, he refines the ideas of his earlier work on madness in his thesis, and corrects himself on some of its errors. He also begins to articulate what would later go on to be his nuanced understanding of power as not residing within individuals but rather in complex sets and patterns of social relations, moving away from what he called an 'analysis of representations' in the final chapter of his thesis – which he admits in these lectures was inadequate. He also changed his attitude towards violence, from one in which he was preoccupied with the continuing physical violence central to asylum practice even post

Pinelian reform in *Madness and Civilisation*, towards an understanding that all networks of power impact on the body as well as the mind, so moving away from a notion of a violent system as one that uses confinement and beatings towards an idea of violence inherent in a system that operates on a network of disciplinarian power, a 'relations of force in these tactical arrangements that permeate institutions'. I think this idea of power being held in the structure of relations, rather than something which is invested in individuals and held or lost by them, is pertinent to the way in which Madness as I experience it perceives power, especially when in the psychiatric system as an inpatient, and it is Foucault's more developed ideas around power that have proved most useful to those working in the field of Mad Studies and activism. I also think they are an interesting lens through which to look at the dynamics of power in relationships in Blake's mythological systems, in which power relations are in a state of constant flux even if some figures, such as Urizen, seem to symbolise its arrangement around on person. There are interesting discussions in one lecture of King George's madness, which Blake will have been well aware of, and the significance of it in the history of madness as the end of a power relation based on sovereignty and the beginning of something more abstractly disciplinarian based on a policing of the self and its understanding of its role and the policing of anything that was considered to exceed the set role.

Guattari, Félix. *Lines of Flight: For Another World of Possibilities* trans. Andrew Goffrey (London: Bloomsbury, 2016)

· Guattari's individual work is far less well known than his collaborative project with Deleuze, but it is powerful in its articulation of frameworks of theory by which

Madness might be seen as a powerful emancipatory force without romanticising it. He is someone who worked regularly with people deemed mentally ill and his writing practice ostensibly aims to bring the virtual presence of the group or collective into the 'solitary writing practice of the individual'. His notions of the 'collective equipment' that's formed by the 'amalgamation of a multitude of intermediary operations' that capture 'the molecular energy of desire of human individuals and groups' shows how complex mechanisms of control and restraint are and how deeply embedded they are in the way we function as a society. He sees madness not as a deficiency or underdevelopment but as a 'resistance to a certain kind of deterritorialised mechanism'. I believe there are fruitful ways in which we can read Blake's constant lines of flight, disorientations, inversions or multifaceted layering of topography as attempts to affect the kind of resistance Guattari defines as diagrammatic assemblage which uses the materials of the collective equipment (the fallen world) against it as a form of resistance and mode of building alternatives (golgonooza or Jerusalem). Guattari also opens up the possibility of using the modes of production – which have enslaved people's minds, bodies and desires – against the controlling ideology to open up 'a new world of possibilities', such as via the use of automation, though he also notes that in all likelihood a mode to retain power dynamics in a favour of the wealthy will be found to repress these possibilities. This mirrors the way in which Los uses his mechanistic methods of forging new worlds to try and 'break the chains' but creates or is subject to new ones even as he acts to break others.

Hillman, James and Shamdasani, Sonu. *Lament of the Dead: Psychology after Jung's Red Book* (New York: Norton, 2013)

· This book examines the dilemmas and challenges thrown up to psychology – especially analytic psychology – by the publication of Jung’s *The Red Book*. It is modelled as a conversation between the two named authors, and presents dialogue as the best way to understand and continually evolve thought around Jung’s work, something which *The Red Book* does itself in the series of encounters Jung has with various figures such as Philemon the Magician. I was fascinated by this as, for me, *The Red Book* in some ways shows that what Jung describes as a ‘psychosis’ and the resultant artistic production are the bedrock of all his later thought, though he seemed afraid to admit it and to be charged with madness, which is suggested as the reason he never published it in his lifetime. The discussions about *The Red Book* are fascinating in relation to Blake and also my own Mad experiences, especially the way in which they discuss religion and spirituality and how Jung’s book sees a common thread to all religions in the ‘experience of a stream of images’ which are only then ‘formalised into creeds, dogmas and institutions’. This is very much in line with Blake’s understandings. The idea of knowing God as knowing one’s experiences, not one’s beliefs, is very pertinent to Blake’s conception.

Hilton, Nelson and Vogler, Thomas A. *Unnam’d Forms: Blake and Textuality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986)

· In this collection of essays Blake’s textuality is discussed. Especially interesting is Gavin Edwards essay ‘Repeating the Same Dull Round’ whose perceptive interpretation of Blake’s often contrary and confusing proverbs and aphorisms suggests a move away from ‘real proverbs’ to statements that provoke argument ‘not just in our mind but between us’, thus questioning the ethics of finality in the making of statements. He

suggests we ‘interpret’ Blake more like what actors do to the text of a play or an orchestra does to a score, rather than ‘what critics think they do with a piece of literature’. This idea of Mad writing being designed to continue to evolve beyond the page and beyond the individual interpreter is very much how I see Blake’s poetry as a mad person, a guide to thinking madly that importantly doesn’t prescribe. There is also much discussion in the essays of Blake’s challenge to ‘book culture’ through the unique means of his methods of production, and thus his resistance to the ‘book’s historical power to impose’, identifying Blake’s idea of the fall as in part being due to Genesis being a creation ‘not only in but of the book’ thus identifying the fall and the book, something that comes up repeatedly in the way Urizen is seen to inscribe law as text in Blake’s myth.

Hornstein, Gail A. *Agnes’s Jacket: A Psychologist’s Search For The Meanings of Madness* (Ross-on-Wye, PCCS Books, 2012)

- Hornstein’s book has become a totemic book for radical psychology in trying to assert the importance of truly paying attention to the voice of the Mad person and the meanings they attach to their experience. Hornstein describes her professional discomfort and then transformation as she attends meetings of Mad people’s organisations such as The Hearing Voices Network and Freedom Center and discovers a whole Mad diasporic community who make sense of their Madness in ways alien to psychiatry and psychology. She also investigates, in light of these personal revelations, historical Mad people and their experiences and sidelined productions. The discussion of the little known John Custance’s book – *Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Philosophy of the Lunatic*– contains many insights into the Mad state with striking resonances to Blake,

describing how mad experiences are messages sent to help the person understand the world, much like how Blake describes his prophetic works as received. His life story also reveals, after much digging by Hornstein, a man who, like Blake, embodied contradiction to the point he was active breaking code at Bletchley Park while also writing books sympathetic to Nazism under another name. The self-annihilations taking place in his life were striking to me, as someone who has had to make meaning of experiences in which I have been convinced of my pure evil as a human as well as striving at the same time to achieve good, much like the battles also fought between and within the Zoas in Blake. The title of the book is also referring to a Mad piece of creative activity, a jacket worn by the inmate of an asylum which contained a rich tapestry of messages on the inside, protected from the gaze of psychiatry, like 'The grain of sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find'. The way in which evasion was seen as a proactive Mad activity rather than a deviant trait also relates to my own experiences of psychiatry both as a hospital inpatient and writer of poems that were seen as evidence of pathology within the psychiatric system due to their meaning evading the understanding of 'psy' professionals.

House, Richard. *Therapy Beyond Modernity: Deconstructing and Transcending Profession-Centred Therapy* (London: Karnac, 2003)

- House's book applies aspects of postmodernism and deconstruction to the 'regime of truth' implicit within psychotherapy, demonstrating that, although it likes to think of itself as adaptable and opposed to psychiatry's dogmatism, it holds dear many taken for granted assumptions that are actually repressive and at the same time form the essence for the justification of psychotherapy as a reified scientific and professional practice,

rather than of artistic dialogue, hermeneutic understandings and conversation. It also notes that there is a lack of evidence that what therapists think is important is helpful, and furthermore evidence that these are things that their clients think are important. This is important in relation to my own experiences of professionals trying to empathise but then reconfigure my own hermeneutic understandings about what has happened to me and what that means, and also to the significant psychoanalytic current in Blake studies that tries to understand his myth on the terms of psychoanalytic theory rather than the adequate terms it sets for itself, and therefore, in my opinion, lose something in their process of understanding. Important though is David Smail's afterword which reflects that it is important that deconstruction does not become its own 'regime of truth', reflecting the Blakean idea that to build a system and impose it on others is to become that which you seek to unseat (Ezekial in TMOHAH, Los at several periods, Urizen, Satan etc.)

Jaynes, Julian. *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000)

· I was led to this book because Patsy Hague, a Dutch voice hearer, famously used it to challenge her psychiatrist Marius Romme's worldview, with a resultant upsurge in investigating voice hearing in Holland that led to the foundation of the hearing voices movement and the Maastricht interview for people who hear voices as a tool to understand the realities of voice hearing in relation to people's narratives of experience. It's postulated theory is outlandish if read as science, but if seen as a system of perceptions designed to reevaluate the way in which we read madness and history it is

a valuable tool. However, his suggestion that Bicameralism was due to a reduced capacity for stress in early man is perhaps in danger of suggesting that the modern voice hearers brain is somehow less developed and thus is in danger of falling into the trap of primitivism that psychiatry and psychology often fall foul of, without the book ever discussing the experiences of voice hearing with communities who actually experience them in the present day.

Jung, C.G. *The Red Book: A Reader's Edition*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani (New York: Norton, 2009)

· I read through both the reader's edition and the illuminated versions of Jung's Red Book as I thought there were powerful similarities between Blake and Jung's visionary journeys and the methods they employed to convey them in illuminated text. I found productive ways to recognise and understand madness through both, but ultimately, though I love the elegance of Jung's thought, he engages with madness as an experiment, not as his day to day reality, and for my own understandings of madness as a way of being – one which chose me not one I chose – and a form of knowledge creation, this is challenging. The fact that Jung, unlike Blake, distinguishes between a chosen 'divine madness' in a platonic sense and a pathological madness shows his eagerness to distance his experiences from that of his clients. However, running contrary to that is often an undermining of his scientific attitude by his own guides and spiritual figures in the text, which does have similarities to the way Blake's mythological figures or understandings of biblical figures evolve and dialogue constantly in contrary states, undermining each other every time a position of stasis or authority is reached. The text of *The Red Book* is therefore, on its own, closer to Blake's

work than the sense Jung himself made of it as an exploration of his psyche is to Blake's thinking.

Jung, C.G. *The Undiscovered Self* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002)

- Jung's late essay has perceptive insights into the way the mind's fear of the other has consequences on a global scale, anticipating Cold War issues such as the Cuban Missile crisis in the projection of one's own unconscious destructive tendencies onto the other, and so learning to fear the other through a fear of the self. This has some resonances with the figure of the Guardian in my own Mad experiences as both of my 'I' and its guide as well as its nemesis and antithesis.

Keynes, Geoffrey. *The Letters of William Blake* (New York: Macmillan, 1956)

The letters of Blake are a valuable resource in their raw form as presented here by Keynes. Importantly for my construction of a Mad Blake, his letters show the same Mad traits as his poetry. They often leap between the quotidian and the visionary and back again rapidly, showing that the world Blake inhabited has, as a verse within one letter shows, always seeing the world at least in twofold vision. The letters also demonstrate that Blake felt controlled by his visions and the more difficult aspects of his madness too: whether it is refusing authorship of poems by claiming he is the 'secretary' of the works he believes are some of the most important ever written, or apologising for lack of contact with friends and benefactors due to 'melancholy with no reason for it' or 'Nervous Fear'. The letters also form a record of how totally Blake lived by his belief in

his vision, and how difficult this could make him as a commissioned engraver, subject of patronage or friendship.

Laing and Anti-Psychiatry ed. Robert Boyers and Robert Orril (London: Penguin, 1972)

- A collection of essays, interviews and lectures published during the heyday of Laing's career establishing the 'role of psychiatrist as prophet'. It demonstrates some of the troublesome aspects of his adoption by the counterculture and also how his adoption as the prophet – rather than the adoption of the Mad person as perceptive prophet and critic of society as his own work would seem to suggest – meant in some ways the rights and the agency of the Mad community themselves were unchanged, something taken up in Sedgwick's criticisms especially. However, Morton Schatzman's essay has particular relevance to Blake in his discussions of what Laing called a 'natural healing process' of ego dissolution and its use in many cultures as a method of healing, but one branded Mad in its negative sense by psychiatry. His description of the 'disintegration' of a person who lives in 'historical, egoic time' as a way to gain knowledge and enlightenment seems in tune with the opening outwards and self dissolution often encountered in Blake's prophetic works by various figures.

Laing, R. D. *The Divided Self* (London: Pelican, 1970)

- Laing's first book has significant importance with regards to my thinking about both Madness and Blake. Firstly, Laing communicates many ideas which I am sympathetic too, and which went on to be developed as part of the wider movement 'anti-psychiatry' (which Laing ended up aligned with though rejecting the term himself.) The idea that madness contains within it meaningful responses to a persons experience of

the world was given huge traction by Laing's work, laying the ground for other work that followed, and arguably helping the survivor voice when it emerged more publically in the consumer/ex-patient/survivor movements in the following decades. At first glance the notion of the divided self has a lot of parallels with Blake's later works, especially the division of the Giant Albion into the Zoas, and their subsequent splitting into emanations and spectres. Secondly, it is the only book by which he mentions Blake's work himself, which he holds in high regard – 'The figures of his Books undergo division in themselves. These books require prolonged study, not to elucidate Blake's psychopathology, but in order to learn from him what, somehow, he knew about in a most intimate fashion, while remaining sane' (p.163). However, while Laing believes there is much to be learned from Blake without looking at his psychopathology, his ultimate judgement is that Blake remained sane, and I feel that is why he feels there is something to be learned at a level above psychopathology. Despite his sympathetic and very human understanding of Madness, Laing still feels that the insane cannot meaningfully use their voice to create knowledge without the conduit of a sane person to interpret, such as himself. The 'case study' attitude he takes to people he has encountered throughout this book is proof of this. Another point of difference between myself and Laing is that he feels that the 'chaotic non-entity' that self division leads to ends up with catatonia and a state 'incompatible with life' (p. 162). While as my project makes clear, self division or annihilation, though terrifying and maddening, is also a site of huge imaginative power, the splitting of self like the splitting of the atom bringing dangerous potential that isn't solely destructive...

Laing, R. D. *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (London: Penguin, 1967)

· As the highpoint of both Laing's experimentation with psychedelics and his positioning of the Mad person as a ultra-perceptive observer of an insane world, there is a lot to be gleaned from Laing's book in relation to the experience of madness as meaningful. However, it does rather glamorise the state of madness at the same time as failing to make the voices of the Mad louder than his own, something that surely should have been a priority if his theories are taken to their conclusion. It does contain many passages of beauty and insight though, and *The Bird of Paradise* is important in its recognition that the form of a philosophical or psychiatric text might be less able to convey Mad ideas and meaning than an artistic exploration and production.

Mad Matters ed. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013)

· This anthology of essays, testimonials, narratives and analyses aims to provide an entry into the area of Mad Studies and features contributions from many of the prominent figures in the field. Notably, many of the contributors are also now teaching Mad Studies and Mad People's history at Ryerson University in Canada where the discipline, if it can be called that, has a real stronghold. It 'continuously stresses the links between Mad activism and other liberation studies, making the book a landmark contribution to the literature on human rights and anti-oppression. For my research it is important as it demonstrates a precedent of people using Mad experiences as a vehicle for knowledge creation. Some of the writing from a social model of disability perspective does rather neglect to discuss the uniqueness and sometimes positiveness of Mad encounters, but generally the chapters are sympathetic to or actively written by

people who share in Mad experience and in activism revolving around it. Especially useful are essays outlining how creative presentation of learning objectives in courses at Ryerson mean that Mad experience has been academically valued there, though the authors note that acceptance of such objectives as ‘students will recognise Mad experience and Mad people’s narratives as legitimate forms of knowledge production’ is far from universal and shows the amount of work left to be done by activists and their allies.

Nayar, Pramod K. ‘William Blake's LONDON as a Surveillance Poem’ *The Explicator* 72:4 (2014) pp. 328-332

- Nayar’s understanding of London as a poem related to increased levels of surveillance is interesting and makes good points about Blake’s prescience in understanding the way power would change and had changed with the emergence of industrial society. However, I struggle to understand ‘London’ as solely a surveillance poem in the sense described: The voice of the poem is active in shaping the world or the poem, marking the faces of people it meets, not just seeing, surveilling or observing.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. *The Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2012)

- Obeyesekere’s book examines visionary experience as ‘ways of knowing that bypass the Cartesian Cogito and the associated idea that reason is the only legitimate access to knowledge.’ He is mindful of terms that suggest abnormality of experiences such as paranormal, and aims to position the visionary experience away from deviance. He

suggests that eastern traditions would have no problem with 'I think' but would with 'I am', something that is interesting with respect to Blake who often referred to himself in the past as 'dead' and discussed 'self annihilation', but for that to occur acknowledged that something like a 'self' could think to annihilate itself as a way of avoiding fossilisation. Obesekere also discusses Blake and suggests that much of Blake's works originated in 'being received' when rational thought is suspended, much like a state of madness – 'spiritual acts written in a state of slumber' but not 'reason's sleep'.

Otto, Peter. *Blake's Critique of Transcendence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

· Otto's depth study of *The Four Zoas* is another invaluable study in my understanding my own ideas about Blake's poetry and its relationship with Madness. He notes that most Blake scholarship of the twentieth century either wrote the poem off as a failure – Erdman described it as 'as mad as the effort to play croquet in wonderland with living mallets and balls' – or as a manuscript whose surface chaos is fascinating, one which, if it doesn't drive readers away, 'rouses their faculties to act'. However, he underlines the fact that both schools put forwards the 'world forming imagination as the antidote to chaos'. This is important, as it suggests that chaos is 'an absence of the imagination', while a mad view of the world, and of Blake, might see chaos as an integral part of the imagination, and of the human condition. For Otto, the *Four Zoas* is an attempt to avoid recoiling from chaos and to treat 'chaos as a human creation'. This is perhaps Blake wanting to examine chaotic thought or madness without attempting to 'make sense' in a traditional sense, and by not doing so to present something madder, perhaps closer to the truth of our madness, and of an unblinkered being-in-the-world.

Otto, Peter. *Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

· This book is the closest I have encountered to a critic understanding Blake in the way in which my madness perceives his writing, so reading it was a powerful experience. Otto uses the idea of deconstruction and construction to convey and understand the powerful forces of both destructive and imaginative world building/destroying in Blake, and how his poetry attempts to move us 'out of our capacity to create worlds' as individuals and groups and to enter into relationship. He notes that what Blake saw as problematic with figures of Reason such as Locke was not that the worlds that they constituted were wrong, but that they were closed and seen as the only world...Blake's madness, like mine, seems to enable him to hold multiple contrary worlds in his mind at once without them phasing each other out. He also talks of the way Blake's work enacts a reversal in our position as readers 'at first they [readers] are subject and the poem is object of their scrutiny, but at the end their relationship is reversed.' This is how I feel Blake wants us to read his poems, in a sense madly, so that they act upon us and provide us with a vehicle for a different mode of thinking. His reading of Blake in the light of Derrida are perceptive, demonstrating that Blake in a way can be seen as more deconstructive in some senses than the father or deconstruction himself, as he is 'not concerned simply to show the impossibility, the violence, of all attempts to close this world within a metaphysics based on a limited set of axioms, but to uncover the relationships in which this labyrinth itself appears...the labyrinth of the fallen world appears as a result of a spatial and temporal distancing (différance) which occurs prior to the appearance of the world in which we live. In Derrida's work Différance is a mysterious, self-motivated, abstract movement whose

existence is postulated by inference from what is. For Blake, [it] is an effect of a particular ... comportment of Albion towards the Zoas which make up his identity and towards the other inhabitants of Eden' This comportment might be the Sanity that prevents progress in Derrida's philosophy, as moments of self transformation via opening outwards, which are continuous in Blake, are not countenanced in Derrida's philosophy, at least not according to Otto.

Patterns of Madness In The Eighteenth Century, ed. Allan Ingram (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1998)

· This collection examines varied patterns of madness in the century in which Blake was born by means of primary texts written on the subject by people during the period, including those by people often deemed insane at the time such as Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*. The understandings of madness are seen as diverse, but Ingram focuses on the fact that, as Swift suggests in *A Tale of a Tub*, 'Epicurus, Diogenes, Appollonius [etc] – would, if they were now in the world...incur manifest danger of phlebotomy, and whips and chains, and dark chambers and straw'. Ingram includes Mad poetry by figures such as Carkesse (any madder than Blake apart from that he was fully charged with it in his time?) who declares that madness was born at Bethlehem, to illustrate a strong undercurrent of Mad people critiquing their own society in the 18th Century and often suffering the consequences of their perceptiveness. This is interesting in relation to Blake, on the one hand, perhaps it is why he was eager to deny his madness, even if his thought would be described as such. On the other, he was not a lone voice singing in

the darkness of his age but one who knew of other writers dueling with similar themes in their work and risking everything to do so, and knew their fates.

Pietikainen, Petteri. *Madness: A History* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015)

· This book consciously aims to examine Madness through history as a cultural phenomenon, but to avoid what Pietikainen sees as the grand narrative Foucault presents which he suggests is itself reductive and neglects to attend to many of the sociological complexities of madness. He is particularly concise on the way in which historians normally have psychiatric records of patients and accounts mediated through professionals, but have failed to see past these to discover the ‘patient narrative’. He also talks about how ‘silencing’ the concept of mental illness was: ‘In short, while madness spoke, mental illness was mute.’ The political ramifications of this development, and its consequences for intersectional silencing historically and in the contemporary landscape, with respect to race, gender and class, are highlighted. This chimes with my own experience. But he also, importantly for an understanding of Blake’s context, describes the temporary nature of madness in the late 18th/early 19th century...Bedlam was not a place most ended up for life. Important when looking at Blake’s contemporaries understandings of him. This is contrasted with the late 19th and 20th century confinement of people in asylums under the auspice of ‘mental illness’ and the social fears of the Mad that ensued.

Psychiatry Disrupted: Theorizing Resistance and Crafting the (R)evolution ed. Bonnie Burstow, Brenda A. LeFrancois and Shaindl Diamond (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014)

· This is a collection of essays drawn from the more radical fringes of Mad Activism, Anti-Psychiatry and Psycho-Political work. It presents a varied set of writings unified in their resistance to dominant modes of what it terms ‘psychiatric oppression’ and includes writings from psychiatric survivors, doubting professionals and academics (often people who wear two or more of those hats simultaneously). It is particularly useful in its discussion of how to form partnerships to resist psychiatry and saneism within academia, with ideas of how to foreground the voices of the Mad not only by hearing their narratives, which can become tokenistic however valuable it can be in providing insights to the Mad experience, but rather by letting them redefine what research into madness and Mad culture should look like, and by Mad people being the ones doing this academic research. This helps to ‘penetrate and explode the myth of a seamlessly repressive monolith of mental regulation’ in academia as well as the mental health system.

Sass, Louis. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992)

· Sass’s study is significant to my conceptualisation of Madness, and also my readings of Blake, in its idea of people he calls ‘schizophrenic’ (his language leaves a lot to be desired even if his concepts are fascinating) as not experiencing a breakdown or atrophy of logic or a failure to access the mind’s higher faculties, but rather experiencing a hypertrophy or excess that most people cannot, or do not, access. He discusses repeatedly how ‘schizophrenics’ are hard to understand, perhaps un-understandable, and that psychiatry and psychology are inadequate to the task they set themselves. Yet

he never seems ready to discard the obvious – the concept of schizophrenia itself – stating instead that to understand it we need models that reflect its heterogeneity and qualities of strangeness. This is interesting in that it acknowledges a complexity to mad thinking often overlooked, and also positions it in the higher faculties; it also gives some understanding of why people might feel very isolated. He is also perceptive on people's use of madness as a method to escape the imposition of power and subjectification, as in his discussing of the Panopticon – which has many parallels with the evasion and self-annihilation, as well as sense of being watched and desire to be hid 'the moment in each day satan can't find' in Blake's later prophecies – and of the 'schizophrenic' patient Lawrence who discusses what others called 'regaining his brilliance' as being to him 'retreating to simpler and simpler modes of thought' which for the 'empiricists' was a marker of his recovery. Yet it does nothing much to humanise Madness in the way I believe Blake or Mad studies or, I hope, my own work does. The cases he presents are fascinating figures but still essentially freaks under his gaze, albeit clever and insightful ones. He never is willing to dispense with his clinical lens and think anew about madness from another perspective outside his profession, however much he establishes new perspectives within it.

Searching For A Rose Garden: Challenging Psychiatry, Fostering Mad Studies (Monmouth: PCCS Books, 2016)

- This anthology of writings from figures across the Mad movement aims to be a contribution to the growing body of work in the field. It has some incredibly moving

personal testimonies about experiences of psychiatric power and its abuses, but also many different voices daring to question how the world might be different for Mad people if, in part, mad by them. Especially interesting of my studies are chapters engaging with non western modes of understanding mental distress as meaningful and profound, and the closing chapter 'the search goes on' which presents multiple views on the most urgent questions we need to ask ourselves as a society, such as 'how can we unlearn fear of madness and stop fighting it?' from Jasna Russo and also questions about how madness can be acknowledged on its own terms within academia, a pressing question for me and many other Mad people.

Sinclair, Iain. *Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 2011)

· Sinclair's lecture presented to the Blake society discusses how Sinclair uses Blake as someone who he can invoke, to use as a lens by which to view London, Sinclair's adopted city on which he has constructed a career of psycho-geographically mapping, in ways somewhat similar to Blake in his later prophetic works in which London, Jerusalem, Golgonooza etc are mapped topographically on top of one another. Sinclair discusses how he was 'sucked into seeing landscape through Blake' who is his 'ultimate guide and presence in the city'. He also talks of Mad Blake as someone removed to the fringes in Felpham as a Mad 'malignancy' (here he is being creative with the biographical details we know). But his notion of Madness in general as a malignancy, as he traces the 'necklace' of asylums ringing London, is poignant and speaks to a notion of Mad people at potentially perceptive critics of the societies in which they live who are removed from it as a result, in line with the way Blake sees the world and Mad

studies and anti-psychiatry position the Mad in their various ways. Sinclair's Blake doesn't, however, appear to have many struggles, in the way that the Blake I 'invoke' does, and therefore might have limited use to the Mad person as a 'guide and presence' in the form in which Sinclair presents him due to a neglect of the sometime painful realities of the Mad in favour of those easier to romanticise.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *Critique of Cynical Reason* trans. Michael Eldred (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

· Sloterdijk's study is interesting for my studies of Madness as a valid way of being in the world as he suggests the life and thought of Diogenes, the quintessential mad figure of ancient Greece, as a basis for a new way of critiquing enlightenment thought. The apocalyptic nature of passages of the book and the dramatic style in which he attacks leading philosophical schools of thought all remind me of Blake, both in his poetic works and his own belligerent marginalia to the texts circulating in his contemporaneous economy of ideas. His attentiveness to the 'physiognomic' aspects of experience as philosophically important also resonates with my experiences of madness, and also the physicality of Blake's poetry and what the Zoas, for example, experience as physical. Sloterdijk suggests that Jesus would be committed to a psychiatric institution if he were alive today - I wonder how this relates to my reading of Jesus in Blake as sometimes the apotheosis of Mad imagination and a liberating force, one which is nonetheless continually quashed by the powers that be out of fear or institutionalised, as religious belief or as psychiatric illness...

Szasz, Thomas S. *Ideology and Insanity: Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization of Man* (London: Marion Boyars Ltd, 1983)

- Szasz's collection of writings enunciate his position, quite removed from other anti-psychiatric figures of Laing and Cooper, of cynicism towards psychiatry due to its impingement on individual liberty from a libertarian position. He is a difficult figure for the Mad movement, and perhaps one harder to find an ally in as someone who experiences madness, as the thrust of his argument appears to be that psychiatric diagnosis is a pseudo-science that helps us avoid confrontations with moral and ethical issues. However, his position is often unsympathetic to the mad person's social struggles, experience of stigmatisation and trauma, even when highlighting them as subject to a disguised political tyranny. His positions often don't defend madness, in short, but rather frame it as a behavioral or moral issue on which his own political views seem to be the measure of its justification or otherwise as a way of being.

The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze ed. Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

- A collection of essays on Deleuze. Most interesting to my study is Eugene W. Hollands essay on Deleuze and Psychoanalysis, a relationship which transformed psychoanalysis into 'schizoanalysis'. The idea, derived from Jung, that the unconscious is not the result of repression, is crucial to Deleuze's thought and also the possibility of meaningful and productive engagement with themes beyond the conscious in myth, religion, spirituality etc in Jung. The conceptualisation of the nuclear family as a 'strictly capitalist' institution enabled Deleuze and Guattari to demonstrate the Oedipus

Complex as historically and socially contingent, but real in the context is is based. Their criticism of psychoanalysis is not that something like the Oedipus complex isn't real in context, but that it does nothing to resolve this, or sees the world in which it is real as the only world possible, rather than one of many possible worlds. This foregrounds the way in which their thought is similar to Blake's, in which the experiences and suffering caused by networks of power that function to impact upon people or aspects of the psyche in his myth in certain ways are all too real, but the aim of the work is to open up new worlds. To supercede the understandings of empirical thought which can only be based on what is quantifiable in the current world and show that the current reality of the world we live in isn't the only one possible.

The Cambridge Companion to William Blake ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

· A compilation of essays on Blake which covers criticism from over a wider period of time than the Palgrave MacMillan Blake Studies book. Interesting essays include Kathleen Raine's, in which she states that Blake moved from political to purely spiritual later in his work, something which might be contested is madness is seen as intrinsic to his work, and as intrinsically political as many in the anti-psychiatric and Mad movement would suggest. Also pertinent to my studies is Brenda Webster's statement that if we were to accept a biographical interpretation of Blake's Milton then we encounter a Blake far madder than the one (sympathetic) critics want to encounter. I would agree with this, but disagree with her psychoanalytically derived picture of Blake as 'sick' mad rather than Mad as a mode of being essential to his work.

Thompson, E. P. *Witness Against The Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

- Thompson's account of Blake as a social radical influenced by Muggletonian religious ideas extends the Erdman view – of Blake as person symptomatic of the societal conditions in which he lived – to new places. Much work since seems to contradict Thompson's idea of Blake's family life as influenced by radical christianity, especially Tobias Churton's research for his biography which examined new correspondence and identifies Blake's parents as Anglican, though of a radical Moravian bent. However, his understanding of how Blake's myth is a way of understanding the oppressive political conditions of the day is well articulated and has resonances with my own 'giant forms' and visionary understandings of society which are embodied in figures such as 'the Guardian' in my poetry. Unfortunately, as his view of Blake politically is attractive to me, other biographical sources suggest that though Blake was extremely radical in thought (perhaps as a result of his embrace of madness as its meanings), he was not so concerned with an organised, pre-marx, proto- socialism as Thompson would have us believe.

William Blake Studies ed. Nicholas M. Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006)

- This compilation of essays on Blake attempted to assess the contemporary state of play in Blake Studies at the time of publication by inviting contributors from a wide spectrum of different approaches to understanding Blake. He outlines the history of Blake's reception up to this point, from the 19th century view being that Blake's work was Mad and impenetrable, to Yeats and Ellis' work attempting to systematise Blake's

thought and subsequent approaches, such as that of Frye, to search for a symbolic order in Blake. He then moves on to discuss the approaches, under the Erdman school of Blake studies, that examine the socio-political context of Blake's work and its relation to such forces. He divides them into 'systematizers' and 'historicizers' and structures the book accordingly, dividing it into textual and cultural approaches, each with their own section. Important contributions to my own understandings include Otto's essay on 'Blake's Composite Art', in which he states Blake's use of 'subjective realities' to 'orchestrate relations between the seeable and sayable effects a dramatic change in what can be said and what constitutes knowledge', something which offers a justification for Madness as a form of knowledge production in line with ideas within the Mad movement. In Angela Eisterhammer's essay on Blake's language she raises the way in which 'Blake wants to collapse the distinction between the signifier and signified [...] so that words and signs become things that mark the reader, and reading becomes an experiential process'. This, for me, might be over-intellectualising a slippage that often occurs in madness, but the effect that it has on the relationship of the reader to the text is something that I am fascinated by in Blake, and that he plays with consciously. Most interesting for my project is the chapter on Blake and Psychology, which examines various psychoanalytic readings of Blake but concludes with what, reading it as a Mad person, constitutes one of the most hurtful and damning critiques of Blake I have read anywhere. It suggests the entirety of Blake's work is a search for reintegration of the self (questionable) but goes on to posit that this is a complex defense mechanism set up to protect against the 'hidden fear' of 'the void outside existence'. My mad experiences are full of encounters with the void, as are Blake's works, and I strongly feel that this reading is more to do with a transference of the author's fear of a mind outside the understandings of psychoanalytic framework than it is relevant to any study of Blake.

To suggest someone whose work deals with the void more than almost any other artist is pathologically fearful of it in an avoidant way seems contradictory. Avoidance would be a lot easier than Blake's explorations of the theme throughout his opus. Interestingly there are chapters in the book addressing Blake via quantum physics and other complex rationalisations of chaos, but none that read him from a mad perspective in a way that doesn't pathologise his way of working and living.

Williams, Nicholas M. *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

· Williams's book is an attempt to understand Blake both as someone who had a prescient understanding of how ideology would evolve in the industrial world and also how a utopianism could be more than 'a sedative for unruly subjects' and actually have some 'disruptive relation to the dominant discourse'. What is key for my interest in his book is that he constantly reiterates the way in which fighting ideology with ideology is a dead end, much like those attempting to overthrow power in Blake (e.g. Ezekial in TMOHAH) end up in the Urizenic position of the oppressor themselves. The way in which utopian vision is seen as having to exist within the grounded reality of existing within an ideology – for example, Oothoon's vision 'grounded [...] in the world she strives to escape' – has resonances with Mad experiences of my own and others identifying with the Mad movement. It also seems to have similarities with Guattari's idea of the Diagrammatic Assemblage that conceptualises the Collective Equipment of a regime of control being bent against it creatively (madly?), one of the few concepts in literary theory that comes close to understanding what I feel Blake is attempting in his

works by foregrounding his mad experience of reality in order to defy sense-making, and thus enclosure via ideological systems.

Wilson, Leigh. *Modernism and Magic: Experiment's with Spiritualism, Theosophy and The Occult* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

· Wilson's book focuses on what she feels is a neglected aspect of Modernism: it's interest in – and in Wilson's eyes devotion to – using practices from the occult, theosophy and spiritualism. For Wilson, these were to do with the way in which magical practice changes mimesis, from the creation of an 'inert' copy to 'an animated copy powerful enough to enact change in the original'. Wilson writes of the 'near silence' about the occult in modernism studies, or the way in which when it is discussed it is seen as a curious piece of experimentation rather than a central way of working and living. Interesting with regards to Blake due to his interests in spiritualism and the magical quality of his work, also the method by which he produces work enacting what Wilson discusses with regards to 'animated copies'. The way in which magic has been underplayed due to embarrassment on behalf of the critical community might have resonances with the way in which madness is treated in Blake and Romanticism in general. Wilson's discussions of how texts such as *Finnegan's Wake* use transformations informed by magic to enact a 'process which is never ending' and thus makes the text a vehicle for enacting magic or madness in the reader has parallels with how Blake's later prophetic work creates a similar effect of continuous transformation and endless interplay of contraries that doesn't cease when the reader finishes the poem.

Woodman, Ross. *Sanity, Madness, Transformation: The Psyche in Romanticism*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005)

· This book is a late effort by Woodman to reconcile his interests in Romanticism and Jung with his personal experiences, coming to a conclusion that Madness as found in Jung and Blake as a form of 'Mental Warfare' and 'Opposition is true friendship' marks a state of being that he sees as more sane than a rationalistic worldview based on Cartesian or Empirical, Victorian modes of thinking. He especially challenges Northrop Frye's reading of Blake which he considers to deny the madness on which Blake's poetry finds its foundation. He is, however, like Jung in forming a separation between psychosis and 'divine madness' in a platonic sense...a path I'm not sure aligns with Blake's own madness which came to him rather than him entering it in a shamanic or ritualistic sense (apart from the séances he staged later in life which some biographers think even Blake didn't take seriously but more used as a performance). Woodman also defines madness as 'an inability of a man to inhabit himself', something that positions this 'inability' as a weakness as it is in most psychological models, but not necessarily in Blake or my own experiences which form a challenge to the notion of self-inhabitation as a desirable goal, even if the alternative is unquestioningly painful at times. His own self described Madness which he leans on in the book also seems far more like a temporary state of stress due to lacking academic certainty, to be resolved by regaining academic understanding, than the radical, physically felt rupture with logic and societal norms that I suggest marks Blake's and marks my own experiences of madness. It seems a little appropriative for him to take the term for what seems to be more academic than existentially felt turmoil. But then this is me creating a new regime of admittance for madness...

Youngquist, Paul. *Madness and Blake's Myth* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University State Press, 1989)

· An incredibly important book to my research area, Youngquist is one of the first more contemporary scholars to foreground Blake's madness in the understanding of his works, and to suggest the works undeniable madness. He tries to avoid pathologising Blake, but seems to do so anyway, with chapters such as 'Schizophrenia and The Ancient Man'. Youngquist suggests that it was wrong of preceding critics to 'dismiss the issue of madness [in Blake] as philistine and naïve'. However, disappointingly to the Mad reader, Youngquist's position is always that of an outsider to madness with a view formed mostly by societal fears of the mad state of mind. So we end up with statements like 'To what extent is Blake's great myth compensatory for the visionary's alienation from the norm of experience, or the pain, perhaps, of life itself.' This kind of attitude fails to acknowledge that such feelings of alienation and challenge to 'norm' experience are no more part of madness than the other moments in Blake in which the world is incredibly transformed in a positive way by experiences as simple as 'seeing infinity in a grain of sand'. By positioning what, as a sane person, Youngquist sees as the negative aspects of madness, as something to which Blake gives meaning as a 'compensatory' function is for him to deny the intrinsic value Blake places upon these experiences himself. This reaches its apotheosis in his discussion of 'The Four Zoas' as schizophrenic experience made into poetry, pathologising what I would agree is a Mad experience but making sense of it as a desperate attempt to hold the self together, rather than a mad exploration of the radical possibilities contained for thought in what Blake praises as 'self-annihilation'. Youngquist's use of terms such as 'autistic world' as a

negative demonstrates the sanism implicit in his understanding of Blake and his allegiance to classic Sneiderian symptomatology in Psychiatry, despite his efforts to distance himself from the psy disciplines at other points in the book. Ultimately, for Youngquist, Blake's myth can be read as pathological, and though I agree that the Madness of Blake shouldn't be sidelined out of embarrassment as it is in Frye, for example, a reintegration of Madness along the lines of viewing it as pathological is always destined to devalue it as a genuine and valid form of knowledge creation, a way of being-in-the-world that has intrinsic value, which is how I view it and believe that Blake did too ("madness as refuge from unbelief").

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