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“Is’t *Lunacy* to call a *spade*, a *spade*?”:
James Carkesse and the Forgotten
Language of Madness

Lisanna Calvi

*They called me mad, and I called them mad,
and damn they outvoted me.*
Nathaniel Lee (attrib.)

James Carkesse, poet and former Navy clerk, was sent to Bedlam in the late 1670s out of religious mania. In his *Lucida Intervalla*, a collection of poems written during his residency at Bethlem Hospital and published in 1679, he illustrates life in the madhouse and offers to the modern reader a singular glimpse into what Michel Foucault would call the “great confinement.” In what is possibly the first collection of verses written and published by an inmate of a mental asylum, Carkesse’s poetry not only gives voice to the lucid intervals within a period of madness, it also reflects the intricate and ambiguous nature of his condition as belonging to the world of the mad, constantly crossing the line between reality and pretence, allegedly feigned and supposedly authentic distraction. Thus, *Lucida Intervalla* offers far more than a glint of the cultural implications of insanity and of its cure in seventeenth-century England and also delves into the problematic relationship between madness and poetical creation.

Lucid intervals, or *lucida intervalla* in its mediaeval Latin plural form, are by definition “periods of temporary sanity occurring between attacks of lunacy.”¹ The same expression was chosen as a title of a collection of

¹ See *OED*, “lucid,” *adj.*, 3.a.

poems the obscure Navy clerk and would-be poet James Carkesse wrote and published in 1679. Although very little is known of Carkesse himself, his poems are an original and possibly unprecedented document that not only adds some interesting material to the history of madness and its treatment in early modern England, but also uncovers an intriguing perspective on the relationship between mental derangement and poetic creation.

As for Carkesse's biography, this is how Samuel Pepys refers to him in his diary: "[T]here is nobody's ill tongue that I fear like his, being a malicious and cunning bold fellow" (Pepys 306). Carkesse was educated at Westminster School and later at Christ Church in Oxford, became an instructor at Magdalen College, Oxford, and was later employed as clerk in the Navy Office, where Pepys made his acquaintance. In the early 1660s he earned a position in the Navy Ticket Office but was dismissed after a couple of years for speculating in the payments to discharged seamen, even though he was soon able to regain his post thanks to some powerful connections, especially with Sir Edward Turnor, the speaker in the House of Commons. The same was probably instrumental also in letting Carkesse out of Bethlem Hospital, where he had been committed for six months in 1678 allegedly diagnosed with raving madness.

Apart from Pepys's notes on his residence at the Navy Office, the only extensive source of information on Carkesse's otherwise obscure existence is his own collection of poems: *Lucida Intervalla: Containing divers Miscellaneous Poems, Written at Finsbury and Bethlem by the Doctors Patient Extraordinary*. Presented as written during their author's internment at Bethlem and at Finsbury madhouse, a private establishment ruled by Dr Thomas Allen – who later treated Carkesse in Bedlam too –, the fifty-three pieces that make up *Lucida Intervalla* allow us to catch a glimpse of what Michel Foucault famously defined as "le grand renfermement" (Foucault, *passim*). In the madhouse, Carkesse's poetic "career" flourished, an event that critically brings to our memory the Foucaultian "silencing of the mad," since, in fact, James Carkesse was not silent at all and not only did he speak *of* madness in his poems, but he did it from *inside* madness or better from *inside the madhouse*.

The title itself, *Lucida Intervalla*, is intriguing as it indirectly states the author's distracted condition, characterized by "lucid intervals," and at the same time denies that same circumstance claiming the poet's lucidity. As Michael V. Deporte has noted, this "must be the first collection of verse ever published in English by the inmate of an asylum" (Carkesse ix).

The poems were published in 1679 by an anonymous London printer, presumably immediately after their author's release from Bed-

lam. Indeed, in the collection, while trying to convince Dr Allen and the other madhouse authorities of his sanity, the poet laments the poor conditions in which he is forced to live. Half naked, confined in a dark cell swarming with mice and lice, he is put through all kinds of cures that were adopted to relieve lunatic patients from the “malicious humours” that were thought to afflict them. Carkesse, in particular, was treated with purges, emetics, bloodlettings, and even occasional beatings. These cures were habitually thought to be of use in cases of mania or raving madness, which leads to the hypothesis that Carkesse was possibly assigned to that specific diagnostic grouping. This assumption may be substantiated by looking at how this particular kind of distraction had been described by sixteenth-century physician Andrew Boorde as “madnes or woodnes [*i.e.*, fury] like a wild beast.” Boorde also advised that, “if neede require,” that kind of “paciēt [. . .] must be punished and beaten” (75-76). In 1583 Philip Barrough described mania in similar terms, and suggested a series of remedies, among which the “letting of blood.” “[I]t is good,” he says, “to cut the uttermost vaine of the arme, or if that do not appeare, then cut the middle vaine” or “let horseleaches round about the head,” and he also adds “you must minister purgations [. . .], and other medicines that will purge choler” (35). Much later, this therapy was still held to be viable as proves William Salmon’s 1694 medical catalogue *The Practice of Curing Disease* in which it is suggested that raving madness should be cured by causing vomit in order to have “the reliques of the Morbisticks matter [. . .] carried off” (772).

Carkesse refers several times to these kinds of cures, and especially to emetics, which he finds revolting and largely ineffective. But why was he confined in the first place? In 1678, he had broken into a meeting of dissenters trying to destroy their house possibly out of devotional zeal, but the grounds of his internment are not totally clear and the allegations of religious enthusiasm are shady since no testimonies of his misdeed are known (except for his own poetic one). The accusation of fanaticism can have a specific link to the association of religion and insanity that had become rather common in the 1650s. Generally, it was Anglican divines – on which part Carkesse now stands as the avenger of conformity – who described the visionary fervour of mid-century sectarian prophets and saints as devilish possession or madness in disguise. His violent interruption seems to have been reason enough for him to be apprehended and conducted to Finsbury and later to Bedlam. In “The Poetical History of Finnesbury Mad-house” (9), Carkesse himself reveals, in a sort of poetic dialogue he engages with the doctor who has just received him, a few details of the assault he had carried on against

what he dubs as the “*Chappel o’th’ Devil*” (Carkesse 11)², that is, the dissenters’ meeting house, in order to allow the “*Church*,” meaning the established Church of England, to flourish over nonconformity:

For surely, the way to Build up the *Church*,
Is to pull down the *Chappel o’th’ Devil*.
Then throw the House out at Window,
And lay it flat with the Ground; (11)

In her study on mental illness and autobiography in the seventeenth century, Katharine Hodgkin points out that “[t]o bring into the open the speech of those who have suffered from madness [. . .] does not really break that silence, for these are people who speak only because they have emerged from it” (11). Yet, this is not the case with the poems of *Lucida Intervalla*, which give voice, or seem to give voice, to “madness-in-progress,” as it were. But what do his poems express? Is it madness or temporary sanity? Carkesse adroitly makes use of rhetorical, literary, and linguistic strategies: his rhyming couplets brilliantly satirize the cures doctor “Mad-Quack” Allen imposes on him, and he even writes short verse epistles addressing them to courtiers and people of importance. He can even play with the stereotype of the “mad poet” and depicts Bedlam as a training ground for making verses: “In *Bedlam*, best of Universities, / The *Poet*, not the *Parson*, takes degrees.” (50). In the asylum he apparently casts off the “*Parson*”’s habit and puts on the poet’s identity and, in the collection, verses are actually used as an instrument both of defence and offence against the condition of social exile and confinement he is suffering. Carkesse poetically confronts his “opponents” (the doctor, the keepers, etc.) and while he wishes to demonstrate his own sanity by making verses, they see in it the very expression of his distraction. In “The Doctors Advice” (27), the doctor expounds his diagnosis and suggests the cure: “*Parson*, leave off the *Poet* and *Lampoon*, / You’le *Sober* be, and may defie the *Moon*” (27). Giving up poetry would restore the patient to health, to which

The Patient replies
Faith, *Doctor*, what you say, is very prity;
I ne’re before (nor now) thought you so witty:
But if’t be thus, your *Phys[ick]*: I’le spill o’th’*ground*,
Vomit up *Helicon*, and then I’m sound. (27)

² All emphases in quotations are as in the original.

The whole piece is structured as a satire against the cures he is receiving through the assumption that sanity means lack of wit, which he identifies here with poetic wit. Mimicking medical jargon, Carkesse identifies “*Helicon*” as the “bad humour” one should expel to regain soundness of mind, but it is Apollo himself, he says in another poem, who will protect him from obnoxious cures:

Sure the *Stars* reign not now, but some dire *Comet*
Sends *Mad-quack* to me with this *Poison'd Vomit*,
But thanks to *Apollo*, who is on my side,
And hath with *Antidote* me fortify'd:
[. . .]
T'elude the needless *Physicks* ill effect,
Purges and *Vomits*, *Helicon* shall correct. (30)

The situation is reversed and “*Helicon*” has now turned into a remedy, the “*Antidote*” against the fruitless but toxic therapy “*Mad-Quack*” would administer. Medical and poetical discourses intermingle and disclose a vision of reality in which the cure becomes the disease and the doctor is the bearer of a deadly potion. It is a critique that does not appear completely preposterous but in fact quite sane, given the brutality of the medical cures of the day. In this scenario, poetical inspiration becomes therefore a shelter, a defence, and indeed an interval of lucidity against those who expect to heal what is sound.

Poetry also helps transmute the reality of the madhouse by bringing light (and consolation) into its darkness and solitude. In “On the Ladies looking into his Cell” (42), the passing glance of a visitor is transfigured into a ray of light that illuminates the dark bottom of the cell in which he has been confined:

When *Doctor Mad-Quack* me i'th' *Dark* had put,
And a close *Prisoner* in my *Cloyster* shut;
A *Lady* chanc'd peep in, whose *Beauty* bright
Enlarg'd the crannies, and let in new light:
Quack, I'm now *pleas'd*, without the *Sun*, *confin'd*;
See how she *Blushes*, by my *Star*, out-shin'd. (42)

The image of female beauty as starlight is a commonplace but in this context he does not use it, or at least not exclusively, to pay homage to an anonymous lady but to resist, defy and even defeat the doctor's decision to deprive the patient of the sun. The “*Star*” that eventually outshines the “*Sun*” is indeed the product of the imagination and these verses, spurred by a casual incident, break through the darkness that encloses the poet and open up a saving crack (“Enlarg'd the crannies”) not

so much in the obscurity of folly, but in the physical constraints that should cure it.

In another poem, “On the Doctors letting him Blood” (52), he ironically acknowledges that poetry is (his) madness and of a kind that finds proper expression through verses:

*Doctor, my Rhythmes on you which do reflect,
Know, of Poetick fury, are th’effect;
To let me Blood then, you’re but Fool in grain,
Unless your Lance prick my Poetick Vein:
No longer now, for shame, pretend the Moon,
For Phoebus rules my Madness and Lampoon.* (52)

The rhetorical clash between the unsearchable, abstract nature of the “*Poetick Vein*” and the reality of blood letting mockingly identifies poetry, which he practices through parody, with (mental) disease. In “On the Doctors telling him . . .” (51), he seemingly (ironically) agrees with the doctor’s opinion on this same matter. Poetry is a kind of madness; that is why, the doctor says, the famous poets, and playwrights of the day, the laureate John Dryden included, will be soon conveyed to Bedlam by royal command:

*For know, New Bedlam, chiefly for th’infected
With this new sort of Madness, was erected:
Bucks both and Rochester, unless they mend,
Hither the King designs forthwith to send:
Sheperd and Dryden too, must on ’em wait;* (51)

The idea of having all poets confined is enthusiastically welcomed by the patient who envisages it as a tangible and even soothing option:

*The answer pleas’d; yet I have cause to fear,
The Doctor flatter’d, as ’tis usual here:
But if my Brethren come, I’ve learnt this Lesson,
In such good Company, Bedlam is no Prison.* (51)

Bedlam would indeed benefit from this kind of crowd, since this is a place where, as he himself allows in another poem, the conventions that rule the outside world are turned upside down:

*Poets and Players, now pack up your Awns,
To Bedlam you aloud, Fop Mad-Quack calls;
And ’till he cures you of Poetick Rage,
Our Galleries you must fill, quit Pit and Stage.* (50)

If Bedlam is a playhouse, poets and actors are called to play the spectators to the drama that doctor Quack, now turned into a comedic fop, will stage for them sitting in the galleries until they are cured. Indeed, as he argues in "The New Distinction" (28), two kinds of patients are to be found in Bedlam: the mad and the witty. The one is "hot" with frenzy and the other is burning with "poetic fire"; the doctor is of course unable to distinguish between the two and administers a generalized cure leaving both exposed to harsh weather and chilly temperatures, "in frost and snow" (28). The remedy is ineffectual for the poet's supposed distraction but proves deleterious for his body making him almost freeze to death:

'Tis true for want of Fire, as if grown old,
 My joynts are stiff, and I'm oppressed with cold;
 But influence of *Apollo* is still strong,
 My *Satyr* brisk, lively my *Muse* and *Song*.
 You that should *Fury* cure, and *Poet* save,
 Are sending Post your *Patient* to the *Grave*.
 For he (not frighted out of's Wits by *Physick*)
 To your new Madness, *Palsie* adds and *Tisick*. (28)

The early categories of the witty and the mad eventually overlap and the idea of a *furor poeticus* that seizes the artist and inspires his creation, which has a long tradition going back to Plato's *Phaedrus* and the "divine fury" of the poet, gets parodically appropriated and becomes the "warming fire" that cannot be numbed by the literal-mindedness of doctor Quack, who has mistaken him for a lunatic while he is a poet, instead. Loosely following the Platonic notion that has "poetic madness" coming from the Muses,³ Carkesse claims that Apollo himself, father of the Muses, has given him a gift and, unlike everyone else, he is now able to recognize and call things by their proper names. He says it is the doctor who should turn into patient as it is his own senses which are lost since he could not tell proper madness from mere masquerade:

³ In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates divides divine madness into four kinds "prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic, having four gods presiding over them; the first was the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of Dionysus, the third that of the Muses, the fourth that of Aphrodite and Eros [. . .] The third kind is the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers" (79, 60).

It's Doctor should be his own Patient;
 [. . .]
 Is't *Lunacy* to call a *spade*, a *spade*?
 And, *Ladies*, tell me, in your *Mascarade*,
 Are wit and senses lost? or doth this follow,
 When *Poetry* is given by *Apollo*?
 [. . .] *Doctor* these *Conclusions* makes;
 For *Lunacy*, *Lampoon* and *Satyre* takes: (63)

While ascribing his folly to simulation, he seems to question the artificial nature of his “Mascarade” by claiming that he is indeed mad, although his distraction proceeds from Apollo, the sun, and not from the moon (“*Lunacy*”), and therefore being confined to Bedlam will be of no avail to improve his condition. For a moment, poetry and madness are made to coincide with each other and he seemingly recognizes to being insane, thus contradicting what he has been claiming all along. Yet, his argument is meandering as he later claims that his being a poet, that is, writing “*Lampoon and Satyre*,” has been wrongly interpreted as madness because of the doctor’s inability to comprehend his sarcasm. Indeed, in a poem he entitles “*Nullum Magnum Ingenium (absit verbo invidia) sine mixtura dementiae*” (24),⁴ he ascribes his own *dementia* to his *magnum ingenium* that he vindicates as his most eminent trait. His being sharp and witty above the “standard pitch” (24) has caused his friends’ envy and has made them wish to have him out of their way. On these terms he accuses them and their accomplice, doctor “Quack”:

Within the *Banks Wit* flows with *Moderation*,
 But *Pride* a deluge makes and *Inundation*:
 This with the *world*, know, is your *common* case;
 And that with *Pride*, *Envy* keeps equal pace:
 Hence they are call'd, by *Plot* of *poor* and *rich*,
Madmen, whose wit's above the standard pitch:
 This makes a *Carcase* with an *Eagles Eye*,
 Be thought a *Fit-for-Bedlam Prodigy*.
 But sure, when *Friends* & you me *Mad* concluded,
 'Twas you your *senses* lost, by th'*Moon deluded*:
 Then take advice; with *Physick*, of *Apollo*
 Pray ask more *Wit*, and 'twill *reason* follow; (24)

Playing upon his own name (Carkesse was also spelt Carkasse or Car-casse), he pictures himself as a “Carcase with an *Eagles Eye*.” The eagle’s eyes were traditionally considered to be very sharp, so that these birds

⁴ The title comes from Seneca’s *De Tranquillitate Animi*.

could even look directly into the sun. As Bartholomeus Anglicus had it in his thirteen-century *De proprietatibus rerum*:

And among all foules, in the egle the vertue of syght is moost myghty and stronge/ for in the egle the spyryte of syghte is moost temperate and moost sharpe in acte and dede of seeng and beholdynge the sonne in the roundnesse of his cercle wythoute any blemiysshynge of eyen/ And the sharpnesse of her syghte is not reboundyd ayen wyth clerenesse of lyghte of the sonne, nother dysperplyd of ye sonne (*Liber XII, Aiii^v*)

The eagle's sight bears moral qualities of temperance and strength which are actually echoed by Carkesse's call for moderation ("Within the *Banks Wit* flows with *Moderation*"). This goes far beyond being just "lucid at intervals" and retorts the charge of madness against the envious fools who have confined him to the madhouse. His wit, his "*Eagles Eye*" allow him a superior sight, and the sun he is staring at without blinking might as well be Apollo's, the god of poetry.

Moreover, the reference to the carcass and the eagle might also bear a Biblical echo to Matthew 24:28, when Jesus, prophesying the end of the world, says to the Apostles that they need to beware of false prophets and deceiving wonders, "For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." If we understand Christ as the carcass and the eagles as his followers, the fact that the poet, despite his prodigiousness, has been confined to Bedlam may shade his confinement with the hue of martyrdom. As with Christ's divinity, his exceptionality has been likewise misunderstood and, even though people around him (his friends, his wife, Pepys himself)⁵ went not as far as having him killed, they nevertheless thought him fit to be shut in the asylum out of ignorance and envy.

A similar perspective is pursued in another poem which deals directly with what appears to have been the very episode that led to his being put away: "On his being Seiz'd for a Mad-man, only for having endeavoured to reduce Dissenters unto the Church" (17). Now the "fire" he refers to is no longer poetic but "Heavenly":

When *Zeal* for *God* inspires the *Breast*,
Says the *Blind world*, the *Man's possess*;
And flattering their own cold desire,
Call *Lunacy*, the *Heavenly Fire*.
But though their *Eyes* are by the *Flame*
So dasled, they mistake the *Name*;

⁵ In "To His Royal Highness" (5), Carkesse actually accuses Samuel Pepys of having benefited from his dismissal from the Navy Office.

Know, that 'twas born with Christ at first
 In *Bethlehem*, and at *Bedlam* Nurst. (17)

As happened with his prodigious "*Eagles Eye*," he says that the world got perplexed and dazzled by the "Heavenly Fire" that guides his deeds, and read it as lunacy. Being blind and cold, which is the opposite physiological state to his being "hot," the world is unable to perceive the authentic nature of his mission, and has misunderstood his motives and high origin of his mission therefore degrading "Bethlehem" into "Bedlam." To be sure, it all seems to be a matter of intention and right apprehension, but Carkesse never clarifies his position, repeatedly claiming he has just been *acting* mad, thus overlapping the boundaries of truth and pretension. In fact, it is never clear why he should have been feigning madness. Despite what he says about his many masquerades, we should not mistake such attitude for a proof of sanity, for "lunacy in disguise" does not necessarily correspond to reasonableness. He seems to dwindle between the two positions of mad and sham and on several occasions, while arguing that he is just "acting the Part" (45) like one on the stage, he simultaneously claims he is not a fraud or at least not a foolish one: "my *Name-sake's* not *Sir Martin*," he says, alluding to the protagonist of John Dryden's eponymous 1667 comedy *Sir Martin Mar-All*, emblem of the silly cheat. He also plays upon his Christian name which he shares with James Nokes, one of the leading comic actors of his time and declares: "My name is James, not Nokes, and yet an Actor" (5). Does it mean he is a true actor, even though not as famous as Nokes? And also, when exactly has he been performing? Was it before or after entering the madhouse? In "To the Duke General," he pleads for deliverance claiming: "A *Mad-man* I have *Acted*, as a *Feat*" (4), but he gives no further explanation for it and his motives remain in the haze.

Of course, ascribing his mad exploit to some kind of "lunatic performance" could work as a self-justification but the idea of feigned madness runs in fact through many of his poems, emphasizing the blurring of the discrimination between reality and make-believe and impairing the unity of his own self. Indeed, the poet's identity gets fragmented into several and at times colliding projections, which vary from intimations of grandeur to a fall into disgrace and humiliation.

As an example, we may take one of the longest and perhaps more intriguing poems in the collection: "Jackstraws Progress" (21). It consists in the description of the poet's arrival at Bethlem Hospital from Finsbury, which he pinpoints as a royal progress, shaping for himself the diverse identities of conqueror, prince, Jackstraw, parson, and patient. His removal is initially transfigured into a conquering assault against Bedlam,

now transformed into a castle ruled by one "Jackstraw" who, according to the poet, has betrayed reason:

Then in my Charet Triumphant Rode away,
As well assur'd that I got the day;
That this has *storm'd* the *Castle* call'd *Jackstraws*,
Arch-Traytor unto *Reason* and her *Laws*. (21)

Yet, his crusade is not to restore Jackstraw to reason but to substitute him as new "prince of the mad." In this capacity, he rides along the streets and is even attended by a "Lacquay throng" (22). As is appropriate to royalty, he procures himself some regalia to finish off his appearance. He chooses a piece of broken glass as his sword and brandishes it while solemnly entering Bedlam's gates:

I arm'd my hands in *Coach* with *broken Glass*
Threatening the *Slaves*, which waited on my *wheel*
That if they touch'd me, they should find 'twas *steel*
Th' *affrighted multitude* observe their *distance*,
Without their *help* I enter, or my *resistance*:
But the great *Tumult*, and such solemn state,
Amus'd the *Officers of Bedlam-Gate*
So well I *Acted*, that they did not stick,
Me to receive as their *Arch-Lunatick*: (22)

His performance has been grandiose and he has now taken the role of Jackstraw, the former "Arch-Traytor to Reason" (21), and has eventually become Bedlam's own "Arch-Lunatick" (22). Jackstraw may refer both to the enigmatic rebel leader of the 1381 peasants' revolt or, as may be the case here, to a man of no substance or worth (*OED* 1). Appropriately enough, in his newly acquired "Jack-quality" he deludes himself with the idea that he can rule the disorderly world of the mad but the keepers, whom he thought he could command, obviously disobey him. Thus the "Parson," who is yet another representation of his same self, recalling his religious feats, is cast into a narrow cell "with *chains* and *darkness*" (23) and treated as any other patient. But if in the upside-down world of the mad the "Prince" has in fact the authority of a "Jackstraw," why does he keep on acting as such? As a matter of fact, the idea of being royal may be linked to one of the different "properties" of madness that later in the century Thomas Tryon would categorize in his *A Discourse of the Causes, Natures, and Cure of Phrensie, Madness or Distraction* (1689). In a passage that sheds light on Carkesse's insistence on being affiliated with the sun, Tryon elaborates on the "*Solar Property*" of madness thus:

[I]f the *Solar Property* do bare Rule, such have great and high thoughts, and lofty Imaginations, fancying themselves to be *Kings* and *Princes*, and that all are in subjection to them; and between while, they are very unruly fierce and boisterous, when they think they are not respected or humoured according to that Quality they have assumed to themselves. (271)

This would imply that Carkesse were creating a poetical *persona* on the basis of contemporary medical diagnosis, even though he has constantly repudiated it in his satirical attacks against “Mad-Quack.” However, his construction of a figural royal identity reaches back and is attuned to his claim to be a prodigy (“a Carcase with an *Eagles Eyes*” 24) or a “Christ-like” missionary imbued with “Heavenly Fire” (17) and further characterizes his pretension to being marked by uncommon and superlative qualities. Indeed, it is an extraordinariness that does not fit the world, be it the one outside or the one inside the madhouse. Far from being considered a “prodigious wit,” he has been confined to Bedlam, where, despite his ironical allegations of superiority and his despising the remedies and the cures he receives, he keeps on being treated as nothing more than an ordinary patient. And it is in fact to this last role he eventually (ironically?) chooses to assign the still “extraordinary” authorship of *Lucida Intervalla*, which is attributed to “the Doctors Patient Extraordinary”.

After a visit to Bedlam in 1657, John Evelyn recorded in his diary that he had seen there “several poor, miserable creatures” and in particular one who “was mad with making verses” (103). Of course this man could not be James Carkesse, who would enter Bedlam more than ten years later, but the description of one “mad with making verses” certainly could have been applied to him. So clearly his situation was not a unique one. Moreover, the fact that no other poems of his are known strengthens the hypothesis that his “*Poetick fury*” actually coincided with and was limited to his sojourn in Bedlam. In fact, it is Carkesse himself who seems to substantiate this possibility when, in one of the opening poems of *Lucida Intervalla*, addressed to the general of the Artillery Ground, he prays to be relieved and actually promises to quit his poetry: “Relieve me; hold! my Suit I won’t Repeat / [. . .] Muse, sound a *Retreat*” (4).

Once he regains his place outside the madhouse, the language he has been speaking in Bedlam is muted and he seems to forget it: the patient has been healed, but his “retreat” into the world of the sane has silenced the poet.

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