

### 3. Reintegrating Madness

#### The Mad in Their Communities

##### Abstract

Remission letters provide evidence for community and family actions and the networks available to help or hinder the mad. While the crimes of the mentally ill most often targeted their kin and communal ties, through the medium of remission letters, these ties were reformed, and connections were reconstructed. The family and the community simultaneously wished to aid the mad and feared the possible consequences of insanity. In some cases, the remission letters sought to tell the story from the perspective of the criminal, thereby encouraging the family members and the notary composing the letter to attempt to rationalize the insanity, creating an alternative understanding of reality through which the mad person's crime was comprehensible.

**Keywords:** Reputation, Protection, Justice, Understanding

When the French king, Charles VI, had his first episode of madness in 1392, the chroniclers described an intense response by the entire realm of France. Michel Pintoin, the chronicler of Saint-Denis, explained in detail:

[w]hen the news was spread throughout the realm, all the true French cried as if for the death of an only son; so much was the health of France attached to that of its king! The clergy, seeing that human remedies were powerless against this strange illness, called on heaven, between tears and sobs, with fervent prayers for the conservation of a life so precious. In all the churches, they added to the divine office oraisons specifically for the king. The bishops, accompanied by their clergy, made processions from church to church. Men and women followed them, barefoot, prostrating themselves before the Lord with groans

and tears, and asked him with one contrite and humble heart for the recovery of the king.<sup>1</sup>

Michel Pintoin was quick to acknowledge that this moving display of unity, with all 'true French' acting with one heart, touched God's heart and led to the king's recovery. Clearly, the chronicler felt that Charles VI's suffering needed divine aid, which could be sought through the intercession of the people of his realm. He linked 'true French' identity and prayers for the king here, 'imagining' or even re-imagining the French realm in terms of the king's madness.<sup>2</sup> As he continued to write about the king's cyclical illness over the next three decades, Michel Pintoin was certain the king's every recovery was due to God's pity for the prayers of the French people. Even when he was simply making a passing reference to the king's recovery, he referred to Charles' 'incolumitas', or 'safety'.<sup>3</sup> This Latin term was unusual in Classical Latin, but would have been easily recognizable to a medieval audience as part of the liturgy. When masses were said for the king's recovery, the French people asked for his 'salus et incolumitas'.<sup>4</sup> The French king's madness simultaneously threatened the cohesion of the French realm and provided an opportunity for the inhabitants of that realm to come together and reaffirm their communal identity and belonging.<sup>5</sup> On a much smaller scale, remission letters for mad

1 Bellaguet 1842, vol. 2, p. 22: 'Ut autem per regnum divulgatum est, omnes veri Francigene tanquam super unigenitorum morte doluerunt. Equidem omnium regnicolarum salus in sua fundata erat. Ideo viri ecclesiastici attendentes, quod vis morbi humanis subsidiis sublevari non poterat, quanto desiderio tunc ipsam affectabant, tanto fervore devocionis et cum mestis singultibus ad Deum se converterunt. Ubique certe facte fuerunt pro ipsa oraciones in celebracione divinorum ab universa Ecclesia. Episcopi cum clero arma de ecclesiis ad ecclesias bajulantes spiritualia, sexu utriusque plebis nudis vestigiis subsequente, ante Dominum prostrati, cum gemitu et lacrimis, corde contrito et humiliato, orabant pro incolumitate regis'.

2 Here I am playing with the term 'imagined community' coined by Benedict Anderson. Though Anderson argues that the printing press was necessary for the creation of an 'imagined community' on the scale of the realm, his oversimplified vision of the Middle Ages suggests that medieval Christians 'had no conception of history as an end-less chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present' and thus were incapable of 'thinking a nation'. Anderson 1983, pp. 23–36. This view has been challenged by medievalists. See especially the essays collected in Forde, Johnson, and Murray 1995. As I have argued elsewhere, the French realm was 'imagined' and constructed just as much as the later nation has been. Pfau 2008, p. 52.

3 Bellaguet 1842, vol. 2, p. 22.

4 Boyle, Byler, and Halsall 1996: 'pro spe salutis, et incolumitatis suae'.

5 As others have argued, processions symbolically represented the body politic by enacting and displaying social roles and hierarchies. It is important to remember the inhabitants themselves performed these spectacles, inscribing their own location within the community through the act of walking the town in which they resided, or through the experience of viewing others moving through space. Spectators were just as much part of the procession as those who were actively

criminals operated in the same way. These letters construed mad crimes as acts that disrupted a person's social identity, which was defined through kin and communal bonds. Nevertheless, by their very nature, these letters sought to reintegrate the mad criminal into their community.

Just as the processions undertaken on behalf of the French king's health sought to deny and suppress the very real fissures in the body politic to present a unified 'true France', the composers of remission letters for the mad drew on idealized visions of communal responsibility in their texts. In doing so, they created an 'imagined community' that differed significantly from the one in which they actually lived, and tied these supplicants and their local communities to the larger French realm, where the king heard their individual complaints and repaired their damaged communities. The letters inscribed an image of a cohesive community ruptured by the madness of the individual. Despite or perhaps even because of this rupture, the communities envisioned by the letter composers worked towards resolution and restructuring. They reimagined the past by exploring options for preventing the crimes of the mad before they occurred, and suggested hopes for the future by reintegrating the mad into their families and communities. When the madness was purportedly of long standing, these letters included details about attempts made to cure the mad by taking them on pilgrimages or, in one case, seeking a physician's aid. The letters also described methods of restraining the mad, by keeping them in chains, or locking them in a small room or outbuilding. Some were kept under surveillance, guarded by their family or by helpful neighbors. These recollections of seeking cures for the mad or attempting to guard them placed the concerns of the mad at the center of the families' prayers and daily lives.

## I. Reputation and Renown

One of the most significant goals of all remission letters was the restoration of the individual's reputation. While all pardon recipients were returned to their previous 'good reputation', the discourse of madness allowed for an even stronger claim that the crime committed did not fit within the character of the perpetrator. For example, in a letter written on behalf of Jehannecte de la Forge, a widow living in Saint Germain la Ville, the composers explained that she had been 'often mad and deprived of reasonable understanding and

of all sense'.<sup>6</sup> She was taken to Notre Dame de Tanovay in 1403, presumably seeking a cure, though the letter does not specify that. One day she was walking down the street when she came across her granddaughter, who was about eighteen months old, 'whom she loved as much as she could when she was in her good senses'.<sup>7</sup> In her madness, however, she threw the child to the ground and cut her throat with a 'scipe' (perhaps a scissor) and killed her. The letter emphasized that Jehannecte de la Forge 'had never had any hatred for her or for any relatives of hers'.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the actions of Jehannecte de la Forge when mad were a departure from her identity when sane. The murder of a young child whom she loved when she was sane was only explicable in the context of her lack of sense. The composers of her letter of remission fulfilled a dual purpose in commenting that she had no quarrel with the girl or with her family. This statement simultaneously denied the possibility that the murder might have been motivated by some familial rivalry and insisted on the disconnection between Jehannecte de la Forge's status as a widow in the community and her actions while mad. The formula at the end of her letter, similar to all others, reads:

we acquit, remit, and pardon in the abovesaid case by our special grace and royal authority the deed and case abovesaid with all penalty, offence, and fine corporal, criminal, and civil which by rigor of justice she could incur against us, and we restore her to her good reputation and renown in the country and to her unconfiscated goods, and on this [subject] we impose perpetual silence on our procurer.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Jehannecte de la Forge's madness that caused her to murder her own daughter's daughter, the king promised to restore her to her good reputation and impose perpetual silence on the subject. In a moment of cognitive tension, the letter sought to erase the crime by telling the full story of it publicly and openly.

6 AN JJ 158 fo 11 no 20: 'souvent forcenee et desmuee dentendement raisonnable et de tout sens'.

7 AN JJ 158 fo 11 no 20: 'laquelle elle ayroit tant que plus ne pouvoit quant elle estoit en bon sens'.

8 AN JJ 158 fo 11 no 20: 'navoit aucune hayne aycelle ne aux amis d'elle'.

9 AN JJ 158 fo 11 no 20: 'quictons remectons et pardonons ou cas dessusdit de notre grace especial et auctorite royal le fait et cas dessus dit avec toute peine offense et amende corporelle criminele et civile en quoy par rigueur elle pouvoit encourir evers nous et justice et la restituer a sa bonne fame et renommee au pais et a ses biens non confisquees en imposant sur ce silence perpetuel a notre procureur'.

Remission letters performed a particular legal function, by allowing stringent laws to be overturned in particular cases. Perhaps most significantly from the perspective of the supplicant, remission called for the reintegration of the criminal into his or her former position within society. The formula of the letters included a clause releasing the criminal from all corporal or civil punishment pertinent to the case. The crime was to be erased on the level of local justice, and it was to have no effect on the criminal's reputation. Clearly the crime could not be erased in reality. In cases of murder, like the one perpetrated by Jehannecte de la Forge, the victim would still be dead, and in cases of theft, even if stolen goods were returned, the crime would remain in the memories of the neighbors of the criminal. A royal decree could not truly affect communal memory, and the process of erasure included the public narration of the act that was supposed to be forgotten. Nevertheless, this legal erasure allowed people to return to their communities, either released from prison or returned from self-imposed exile. Indeed, the fact that remission was sought by individuals who had chosen to go into exile to escape from their crimes suggests the importance of the bonds of family and community. These supplicants implied in their letters that self-imposed exile was as much of a punishment as official banishment by the system of justice would have been.

Muriel Laharie, in her book on madness in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, notes that the law allowed mad people to be released from prison if they recovered. She suggests, however, that most families would have preferred to leave their mad relatives in prison, paying for their upkeep, but otherwise free of the burden of caring for them, particularly since a recovery was no guarantee that the madness would not resurface later.<sup>10</sup> But the evidence from remission letters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries shows that many families preferred to have their relatives released into their care. Indeed, in most cases the mad people were still suffering from their illness when the family asked for them to be released from prison.

### **Fama**

The choice to seek remission for a mad family member was not necessarily based entirely on sympathy or a desire to protect the mad person. Gaining remission involved a large investment of money and travel by the family. In addition, the family of the mad, in asking for the release of a mad person without punishment, was agreeing to take responsibility for controlling

<sup>10</sup> Laharie 1991, pp. 253–255.

him or her in the future. In thinking about the motivations for the family to seek remission for their mad relatives, it is important to remember that in most remission letters, the criminal's feelings of shame came, not from having committed the criminal act, but from having been apprehended and imprisoned.<sup>11</sup> The shame of having a family member in prison or executed may have been more damaging to the reputation than caring for a mad relative in the household. Once a criminal case was brought to the attention of the local administrators of justice, the suspected perpetrator would be arrested and put in prison to await his or her trial. Often suspects would flee, essentially initiating a self-imposed exile since a decision to leave was taken as irrefutable proof of guilt. The concept of imprisonment as punishment was developing in this period, and it was occasionally cited as an alternative penalty if the culprit was incapable of paying the allotted fine.<sup>12</sup> Letters of remission reveal a strong fear of prisons and a recognition of time spent in prison as punishing, even if it was not officially used for that purpose in the context of the letter. Trials could be lengthy, and only the noble or wealthy could buy special treatment in prisons,<sup>13</sup> so some remission letters, highlighting the unpleasant conditions there, implied that punishment had already been meted out through a particularly long imprisonment. Remission letters often indicated further that the individual was likely to die before the completion of the trial, suggesting that prison could be a *de facto* capital punishment.

Remission rhetorically erased the crime, not only on the level of government officials, who could no longer pursue the pardoned criminal for that crime, but also on the level of the community, since the letter restored the criminal to his or her 'good reputation and renown'. The wider community's knowledge of an individual's character, as represented in common reputation and renown, was generally referred to in Latin sources as *fama* and in French as *fame* and *renomee*. *Fama*, or 'reputation', was a legal category that could affect a person and his or her family's standing in civil cases, ability to make contracts, and likelihood of conviction in criminal cases.<sup>14</sup>

11 Texier 2001, p. 485.

12 Dunbabin 2002, pp. 112–113. Dunbabin traces the development of the punitive function of prisons to the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Prisons were still mainly intended to confine people awaiting trial, however. See also Dean 2001, pp. 120–124.

13 Dunbabin 2002, p. 125. She notes, however, that the 'drawback to affluence' was that, regardless of the results of a trial, the wealthy were often forced to pay higher charges for release.

14 For an exploration of the development of the legal concept of *infama*, see Peters 1990. For an analysis focused more directly on France, particularly on the question of reputation in French customs, see Akehurst 2003. Daniel Smail has shown how reputation played a large role in both civil and criminal legal cases in Marseille, looking particularly at the ways in which witnesses' reputations could be challenged in order to erase their testimony, Smail 2003.

At the same time, 'reputation' was also a social category, determined by and affecting one's standing in the community.<sup>15</sup> Threats to an individual's reputation could threaten the reputation of the entire family, so the decision to seek remission for a mad family member may have been driven by a perceived need to restore the family's good standing in the community. Recent scholarship has revealed the multiple ways that an individual's *fama* or reputation could affect the prosecution and outcome of legal cases, both civil and criminal. According to Roman law, one of the ways to incur *infama* in its legal sense was by being convicted of a crime.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, bad *fama* could be a self-fulfilling prophesy, with those considered infamous in their community moving further and further into criminal activities, as David Chambers and Trevor Dean note in their discussion of criminality in fifteenth-century Italy.<sup>17</sup> The maintenance of good reputation was essential in an economy based on face to face interactions.

In theory, social reputation translated into legal reputation, since reputation and renown were proved in court through the use of witnesses who would testify to their own knowledge of the person. Thomas Kuehn argues, however, that 'there was no simple, direct, or automatic connection' between the two.<sup>18</sup> Rather, public reputation and common knowledge combined with the judges' knowledge of legal theories and discourse to create a legal category that was related to but not solely derived from communal consensus. Kuehn notes that the professional jurists and judges often determined what forms of common knowledge and reputation could 'count' in a legal setting: 'On the one hand, courts and jurists treated reputation and gossip as nonprofessional and resisted or limited their scope accordingly. On the other, common talk, properly disciplined, was one basis of proof and status.'<sup>19</sup> At a time when basic 'facts' of identity, such as birth dates, marriages, diseases (including madness), and deaths, were not necessarily recorded in written documents, witnesses' testimony about common knowledge was used to establish this information when it was pertinent to a case. Philippe de Beamanoir's book of customary law provides evidence that people's reputations (common knowledge of facts (*notoire*) and witness testimony to confirm these things) were central to legal practice.<sup>20</sup>

15 Hanawalt 1998, pp. 1–14.

16 Peters 1990, pp. 43–89; G.R. Evans 2002, pp. 123–129.

17 Chambers and Dean 1997, pp. 23–24.

18 Kuehn 2003, p. 27.

19 Kuehn 2003, p. 29.

20 Akehurst 2003.

Policing existed on a very basic level by this period, and particularly noticeable crimes were brought to the attention of the courts through a number of different avenues, only one of which was private denunciation. Laura Stern has shown that criminal cases in Florence were more likely to be initiated due to public *fama* (reputation), denunciation by an official, or inquisition *ex officio*, than by private accusation. Public reputation was not only the cause of the highest percentage of cases but also had the highest rate of conviction.<sup>21</sup> While the numbers certainly differ from place to place and from legal system to legal system, these percentages are suggestive of a larger pattern of accusation and conviction where *fama* was important for determining the outcome of trials. Communal knowledge was used to establish the details of a case, not just the reputation of the accused. During a court case, witnesses would be called to explain not only what they knew themselves but also what they considered 'common knowledge' in the community.

Professional jurists were not the only ones in a position to manipulate these categories, then. Witnesses could also control what they considered important 'common knowledge' in an effort to affect the outcome of legal cases, as Daniel Smail has demonstrated. Using civil cases in late medieval Marseille, he examines the ways that witnesses established the bad *fama* of the adverse party, and argues that the manipulation of reputations may even have been the ultimate goal of the litigant, which might explain the parties' willingness to undertake expensive and lengthy litigations. Sometimes the trials were not resolved at all, and even when they were the litigants often won less money than they had spent on the case.<sup>22</sup> However, the airing of differences in a public forum allowed the litigants to affect public knowledge and reputation through the legal case. The relationship between social *fama* and legal *fama* was circular, then, as each could affect the other.

The legal system both reflected and constructed communal rights and responsibilities. Community members depended upon one another for survival, but were also constantly competing over resources.<sup>23</sup> Ideals of neighborliness were a necessary part of life, and were policed as such. If people in the community agreed someone was of bad reputation their opinion could be sufficient for conviction in criminal cases, whereas good reputation could lead to acquittal, conviction for a lesser offense, or

21 Stern 1994, pp. 203–205.

22 Smail 2003, pp. 150–152.

23 David Sabeian 1984 demonstrates this constant negotiation between neighborliness and conflict in early modern Germany.

conviction but with a lighter punishment. 'Common knowledge' had a role to play in jurisdiction. Almost all remission letters were constructed around the idea that the crime committed was not part of a criminal lifestyle. While the victims were sometimes described as individuals with bad reputations (*mala fama*), the perpetrators seeking remission were almost universally described as people of good reputation, who had never been accused or convicted of any previous crime. As a result, every letter to some degree describes and seeks to explain a moment of rupture. However, for those individuals identified as mad, the rupture was more extreme, and thus the explanation was even more exculpatory.

French customary law considered mad people potentially threatening to themselves and others. They recommended that the mad be guarded by their families and even by the community at large. Unlike Foucault's image of the wandering, isolated mad,<sup>24</sup> the law codes created an image of the mad as a central focus of communal concern.<sup>25</sup> The need to protect both the mad person and the community at large from the prospective damaging effects of madness underlay the recommendation that 'everyone' join together in a communal effort to guard the mad.<sup>26</sup> Mad people were considered communal burdens. Much like the customary law books, remission letters were written within the context of an 'imagined community' on the scale of the neighborhood and of the realm. These remission letters constructed images of communal involvement with madness. Neighbors' awareness of each other's lives invaded the home to consider the *gouvernance* of each member of the community. One of the explanations remission letters provided for why people who had been recognized as mad were able to commit crimes was because of *mal gouvernance*: the failure of their immediate family to care for them sufficiently. *Mal gouvernance* carried a wealth of censure in its connotations. It was used to describe women and men who did not care for their own children or who carried on adulterous affairs.<sup>27</sup> It also indicated a criminal negligence on the part of the household that would allow a man or woman who was only slightly wounded to die of those wounds.<sup>28</sup>

24 Foucault 2006, p. 9.

25 Rapetti 1850, p. 73, XXI.5.

26 Philippe de Beaumanoir 1970–1974, vol. 2, chapter 52, paragraph 1575; Gruchy 1881, p. 184, LXXIX.

27 See ANJJ 99 fo 33 no 104 (in 1367); ANJJ 176 fo 246 no 329 (in 1443); ANJJ 181 fo 55 no 100 (in 1452); ANJJ 204 fo 6v no 13 (in 1473).

28 See ANJJ 181 fo 19 no 34 (in 1451); ANJJ 181 fo 67v no 123 (in 1452); ANJJ 182 fo 18v no 33 (in 1453); ANJJ 182 fo 51v no 86 (in 1453).

A number of studies have established the significance of the household in the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> Households have been described as the basic economic unit of the Middle Ages, involving all members in the farming, craft, or trade of the whole.<sup>30</sup> Each member of the household, which was composed not only of a nuclear family but also included a variety of other members, such as extended family, servants, and apprentices, played a role in the smooth and efficient running of the business. These households were linked to each other through kinship, guilds, parishes, location in a town or city, and jurisdiction. Since, as David Herlihy has argued, society was ultimately made up of households,<sup>31</sup> the larger communities expressed concern about and attempted to impose controls on the households. Social interactions were based on *fama*, the rumored information that became common knowledge, regardless of factual truth, about each person and, often, spread to include his or her household. Composers of remission letters sought to establish the community's shared knowledge of the person who had committed a crime. In most cases, the reputation of the individual was established to be 'good'. However, in remission letters for mad criminals, often their mental state was confirmed by reference to common renown. This communal memory was sometimes evoked by reference to communal awareness of, concern about, and protection for the mad person's victims, or, in some situations, the mad person him- or herself.

### Remission

Remission letters themselves provide the strongest evidence of the reconstruction of kin and communal bonds around the disruptive figure of the mad. These letters, composed by the family on behalf of the mad person, carried within their narratives a resolution that sought to restore the equilibrium of the local community. Because remission letters had to be read aloud by a local judge, the reconciliation was a public one. Despite, or indeed perhaps because of, the admission of guilt embedded within these letters that echoed public confession of sin, remission claimed to exonerate the criminal in the eyes of the community as a whole.

Jacques Mignon's remission letter, composed in 1458, described an unusual case, with a high level of community involvement.<sup>32</sup> According to the letter,

29 Many of these have focused on Italy. See Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985; and Hughes 1975. For peasant families in England, see Hanawalt 1986.

30 Herlihy 1983.

31 Herlihy 1985.

32 This case is also discussed in Pfau 2010b.

Jacques Mignon was known to be ‘perturbed and altered in his senses’,<sup>33</sup> but was well-loved by his neighbors in the small town of Richardère, near Bressuire in Poitou, because he would bring them pleasure by making (or doing) cartwheels.<sup>34</sup> When his wife, who was described as ‘completely stupid, of simple and very small comportment, in such a manner that she does not know how to govern herself any better than a small child’,<sup>35</sup> stopped riding into town with him in 1457, the townspeople brought her disappearance to the attention of the local officials.<sup>36</sup> Jacques was taken into custody and questioned, at which point he freely confessed that he had killed her. Jacques explained that she had asked to be taken to see her parents. They had begun the journey one night, leaving their five children asleep. Halfway there, he claimed, he had stopped the cart next to a river with a watermill and thrown her in the water, where she drowned. He had returned home alone and gone to sleep.

Jacques Mignon’s free confession, without the use of torture, was considered suspect by the officers of the law. Since they had no other proof in addition to the mad man’s confession, which was not considered legally valid testimony,<sup>37</sup> the local authorities could not proceed. They could not find a body, despite sending enquiries to the watermill to see if one had been discovered, and no one brought a case against Jacques Mignon for the death of his wife. The authorities were faced with a serious quandary as they tried to reconcile a need to protect the community against the possibly violent actions of a mad man and the need to protect the mad man from his own inability to comprehend reality. The remission letter was presented as a way to avoid dealing with a difficult legal situation. Jacques Mignon remembered killing his wife, and was fully capable of narrating the murder

33 AN JJ 188 fo 10 no 15, edited in Guérin 1909, vol. 10, pp. 92–94: ‘perturbé et alteré de son entendement’.

34 It is unclear to me how making wheels for a cart would give pleasure to the people, which is why I suggest that he may have performed for them. AN JJ 188 fo 10 no 15, edited in Guérin 1909, vol. 10, pp. 92–94: ‘et estoit amé au país pour ce qu’il ce mesloit et entremettoit de faire roues de charette, et en ce et autres choses faisoit plusieurs plaisirs aux gens du país d’ilec environ’.

35 AN JJ 188 fo 10 no 15, edited in Guérin 1909, vol. 10, pp. 92–94: ‘toute sote, de simple et très petit gouvernement, en telle manière qu’elle ne se savoit gouverner, non plus que ung petit enfant’. Irina Metzler interprets this as ‘the case of an “idiot” murdered by her insane husband’. Metzler 2016, p. 163. I would argue the narrative is more complex than that, and that the language used does not sufficiently distinguish between the two in the way Metzler asserts.

36 For more on denunciation by public *fama*, see Stern 1994, pp. 203–205.

37 This concept appeared in Justinian’s code, Behrends, Knütel, and Mommsen 1995, vol. 1, pp. 78–80, Inst. 2.10, and was also brought into French customary law. See Philippe de Beaumanoir 1970–1974, vol. 1, chapter 12, paragraph 411 and vol. 2, chapter 34, paragraph 1061. See also Pfau 2010b.

when questioned about it. In his case, the local officers doubted whether his wife was actually dead, despite his belief that he had killed her. Jacques Mignon's willingness to confess to murder, apparently unaware of the penalties involved in such a confession, made the officers, who already knew from local repute that he was mad, unwilling to prosecute him for the crime without any further proof that his wife was dead. In the end, as the remission letter attests, they chose to protect the mad man, and the community banded together to seek a royal pardon for their entertaining friend, despite their awareness that he might have killed his wife.<sup>38</sup>

## II. Community Concern: Chains, Cures, Recoveries, and Relapses

French customary laws expressed concerns about the potential dangers posed by mad people in their communities and recommended a variety of ways to cope, both before and after a crime had been committed. The *Ancienne Coutume de Normandie* made provisions for mad people who seemed likely to commit crimes, noting that

If anyone is in such a way mad [*forsené*], that it is feared that he from his madness [*forcenerie*] might trouble the country, either by fire or by another thing that is contrary to the common health, he must be tied, and guarded by those who have his things, so that he does not wrong anyone; and if he has nothing, all the neighbors must give counsel and aid to his [family], to moderate his madness [*forcenerie*].<sup>39</sup>

The Norman customal was concerned about people who were mad 'in such a way' that they were considered likely criminals. Mad people were clearly considered communal burdens, since they were threatening to the 'common health'. In addition to the common concern that mad people might kill themselves or others, the Norman customal adds the fear that mad people might commit arson. Fire was clearly a major concern in communities made

38 Jacques Mignon was not a fool employed by the nobility, but he does appear to fulfill a similar function for the town of Richardère.

39 Gruchy 1881, p. 184, LXXIX: 'De Forcenés [...]. Se aucun est en telle manière forsené, que l'en le doye doubter que de sa forcenerie il ne trouble le pays, ou par feu ou par aucune chose qui soit contraire au commun salut, il doit estre lié, et gardé par ceulx qui ont ses choses, qu'il ne mesface à nulluy; et s'il n'a rien, tout le voesiné doit mettre conseil et aide du sien, à refréner sa forcenerie'.

of flammable materials, since a blaze begun in one house could quickly spread to the entire neighborhood. Thus, the entire neighborhood was responsible for surveillance of the mad, to prevent potential disasters, not only on an individual level, but also for the community at large.

Norman custom also suggested the community was responsible for the upkeep of a mad person, noting that '[i]f anyone is out of his senses, and he kills or injures a man by his madness [*forsenerie*], he should be put in prison, and be sustained by his [goods]; or it should be procured for him from the common alms, if he does not have anything with which he can be sustained'.<sup>40</sup> In Normandy, then, the community was expected to pay for the care of imprisoned mad criminals through their almsgiving, which suggests a very complicated attitude towards the mad. Here they appear as objects of pity, appropriate receivers of alms alongside the poor and lepers, but without the type of reciprocal relationship that almsgiving usually implied, where the prayers of the receiver were exchanged for the temporal support of the giver.<sup>41</sup> Not only would mad people be incapable of filling the role of grateful bedesmen and women, but also the legal text specifically indicates that this money was to be used for the care of a mad person who had been imprisoned because he or she had killed or injured another person. Thus, the uncomprehending criminal, who was incapable of prayer and whose inability to function normally in the world had injured or killed another person, somehow remained a reasonable recipient of community alms. The Norman customary law created a sense of communal responsibility through the figure of the mad criminal.

Like the Norman customal, Philippe de Beaumanoir also suggested imprisonment of the mad in order to prevent them from committing a crime, recommending that guardians take preventative action in the case of a person who 'went mad', rather than waiting until a crime had been committed. He explained that

Those who are insane [*forsené*] should be bound by those who must guard them and everyone must help do this to avoid the damages that might come from them, for they could quickly kill themselves and others. And if they are not bound and they commit, because of their mad senses [*fol sens*], a homicide or any other serious crime, they are not punished like

40 Gruchy 1881, p. 184: 'De Forcenés. Se aulcun est hors du sens, et il occist ou mehaine ung homme par sa forsenerie, il doit estre mis en prison, et estre soustenu du sien; ou l'en luy doit pourveoir des communes omosnes, s'il n'a de quoy il puisse estre soustenu'.

41 See Rubin 1987 and Mollat 1986.

others because they do not know what they are doing, and their heirs do not for this reason lose what the insane [*forsenés*] person had, unless they had them in their care and it was done due to their inattention [*mauvais garde*]. But in any case the insane people [*forsenés*] must be placed in such a prison that they can never leave it, and be maintained from their own property as long as they are out of their senses [*hors du sens*]. And if he returns to his senses, he should be released from prison, and his goods returned to him.<sup>42</sup>

The focus here is clearly on the need to protect both the mad person and the community at large. Beaumanoir expressed a fear that mad people might commit suicide or murder, and that keeping such people bound or locked up would protect them and their community from their actions. In his view, all those who were insane contained within them the potential for such disruptive action. Interestingly, although Beaumanoir recommended that mad people be maintained from their own property, he also noted that ‘everyone’ must help to guard them, suggesting the need for a communal effort, much like the Norman customal. In contrast, a mid-fifteenth century customal from Anjou and Maine insisted that the perpetual imprisonment of a mad person should be paid for by the mad person.<sup>43</sup>

The *Livres de justice*, in a departure from the other customals, held the family directly responsible for their mad relatives, suggesting that those who should have been guarding the mad be punished for the mad person’s crimes:

And if it is so, in the moment when he did the deed, that his friend had him in guard, such that he should have guarded him, you must call those who should have guarded him at the time when he did the deed: and if you find that he had been so negligent that by his negligence was the deed done, the law says that he must be put in punishment. – Because the guard of a mad person [*forsenez*] is given to his friends, not only so

42 Philippe de Beaumanoir 1970–1974, vol. 2, ch. 52, paragraph 1575: ‘Cil qui sont forsené doivent estre lié par ceus qui les doivent garder et chascuns doit aidier a ce fere pour eschiver les damages qui par aus pueent venir, car tost ociroient aus et autrui. Et s’il ne sont lié et il font par leur fol sens aucun homicide ou aucun autre vilain cas, il ne sont pas justicié en la maniere des autres pour ce qu’il ne sevent qu’il font, ne leur oir ne perdent pas pour ce ce [sic] que li forsenés avoit, se ainsi n’est qu’il l’eussent en garde et que par leur mauvese garde li mesfès fu fes. Mes toutes voies li forsenés doit estre mis en tele prison qu’il n’en isse jamès, et soit soutenus du sien tant comme il sera hors du sens. Et s’il revient bien en son sens, il doit estre delivrés de prison, et li siens rendus’.

43 Beautemps-Beaupré 1883, p. 268.

that he cannot do anything bad to himself, but so that he does nothing bad to others.

And if the mad person [*desvé*] does something that he should not, the culpability should by right fall on those who should have guarded him, because he did that deed because of bad guard.<sup>44</sup>

The author of the *Livres de justice* was invested in finding a responsible party to be blamed and punished for the criminal act. This potential reassignment of guilt may have been a driving force for family members seeking remission, since they may have feared they would be called to court for their relative's crime.

Community fears about the potentially dangerous actions of the mad occasionally translated into action in remission narratives. According to the remission letter Guillaume le Racif sought for his wife, Jehanne, she had been 'for a long time and on many occasions lunatic, frenzied, and insensible in such a way that she did not know how to maintain herself'.<sup>45</sup> Her madness was not constant, however, and she was considered capable of taking care of herself and her family during periods of sanity. One day in early April 1379, Jehanne le Racif was reportedly alone in the house with her four young children, when she was 'surprised by her said sickness'.<sup>46</sup> She picked up the youngest child, who was a baby girl aged six months, whom Jehanne had been breastfeeding, and hit the child on the stomach and sides until the baby died. Her other three children ran out of the house and cried out in the streets until a good neighbor woman heard them. She entered the house and found Jehanne 'completely enraged and insensible and supposed that from the said sickness she might do the same thing to her other children'.<sup>47</sup> The neighbor, clearly aware of the general *fama* about Jehanne's illness, acted to protect the family of the mad woman by

44 Rapetti 1850, p. 73 XXI.5: 'Et s'il est ensi, en tel point où il fit le fet, que si ami l'eussent en garde, qu'il le deussent garder, tu dois apeler cels qui le devient garder en cel tens qu'il fist le fet: et se tu trueves qu'il aient esté si négligent que par lor négligence soit li forpez fet, droiz dit que l'en les doit metre en poine. -- Quar la garde est baillie de forsenez à lor amis, non pas solement por aus qu'il facent mal, mès qu'il ne facent mal à autres.

Et se li desvé font chose qu'il ne doivent, l'en doit par droit metre lor colpes sor cels qui les doivent garder, comme il face tel fet par mauvèse garde'.

45 ANJJ 114 fo 106v no 212: 'de long temps souvente fois lunatique frenaisonse et incensibile en tele maniere que elle ne scet son gouvernement'.

46 ANJJ 114 fo 106v no 212: 'fu de la dicte maladie surprise'.

47 ANJJ 114 fo 106v no 212: 'toute enragie et insensible et suppos len que par sa dict maladie elle eust ainsi fait de ses autre enfans qui ny feust seurvenu pour le quel fait ainsi advenu par meschief de la dicte maladie la dit Jehanne est prisonnier'.

intervening in the household and causing Jehanne to be arrested. She was put into prison in Orléans, where, because of her sickness, she had no idea where she was and insisted she had done nothing wrong.

Community networks were created as much by exclusion as by inclusion. In some cases a community's lack of care and concern for outsiders was cited as a cause of madness. Gouyn Cluchat's letter of 1459, discussed in detail below, demonstrated the possibility of failure in seeking help outside your own community.<sup>48</sup> When his family moved to a neighboring town to escape the plague, they ran out of provisions before it was safe to return. He decided to go into a nearby city to beg for food, but despite all his efforts, no one in this new town was willing to help him care for his family. As strangers and outsiders, Gouyn Cluchat's family had no recognized right to receive aid from their new neighbors. Indeed, community aid only arrived once the crisis reached its peak, and even then it did not alleviate the original problem. Cluchat became suicidal, attempting to drown himself in a fountain in the town. A woman passing by stopped to ask him what he was doing, expressing concern, but too late to help Cluchat, who fled. Instead of killing himself, he returned home and, 'as if he was out of his senses', killed his wife with an axe.<sup>49</sup>

His neighbors did not offer support, and even after he killed his wife, they refused to act for or against him. Cluchat told them he had just killed his wife and asked them to have him arrested. Indeed, when they refused, he went even further, traveling to the nearby city of Combronde and demanding they put him to death for his crime. At this moment, when it was no longer possible to save Cluchat's wife, his extended family, who for reasons unmentioned in the letter had not been available to give him provisions, proffered aid by seeking remission on his behalf. Given the price of a remission letter, this generosity was too much too late. His letter, like many others, leaves us with no clear picture of his ultimate fate. He was released from prison on the authority of the king, and with no conditions such as keeping him chained up or under guard. His family seemed to believe his release would prevent his children from becoming beggars, but they provided no hint about what would be done to cope with his extreme depression and his desire to be punished for his crime. Cluchat's decision to leave his local network and seek aid elsewhere was the source of his difficulties.

Despite these difficulties in seeking communal aid outside one's home village, the narratives in the remission letters suggest that local neighborly

48 AN JJ 188 fo 81 no 16o.

49 AN JJ 188 fo 81 no 16o: 'come hors du sens et debilite de son entendement'.

aid was generally expected to be forthcoming. The responsibility of guarding mad people, particularly those who were suspected of suicidal tendencies, rested with the immediate household, but there is ample evidence that the assistance of neighbors was sought and, very often, provided. Generally this neighborly aid arose in the context of a tale about a failed attempt at preventing suicide, as the mad person escaped and died. Usually this guardian duty fell on the local women, perhaps as an extension of their work as nurses. Symonnette aux Beufs came to watch over the sickbed of Jehan Massetirer in 1394. Earlier in the day, Jehan had left the house and attempted to drown himself in the river, but he was saved by his wife and two men passing by. Left alone with Symonnette, Jehan got out of bed, completely naked (a detail that seems intended to reinforce his madness, since he was willing to walk around naked in front of a neighbor woman), and hit her over the head, knocking her down. He ran out of the house, jumped into a well nearby, and was drowned before anyone could pull him out.<sup>50</sup> Another case described a number of controls put in place by Robert Senuminem's wife and close family to prevent him from harming himself or others. In this case, the guards came from within the household. Robert, 'during his life by intervals and some times for a very long time was furious'.<sup>51</sup> As a result, his close family placed people in his household to 'keep him company so as to guard him'.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, after hearing the mass on Tuesday, 28 April 1404, his family explained that he returned home, convincing the chamber maid he wanted to sleep. When she left him in bed, he got up and hanged himself, despite the valiant attempts made to prevent him from achieving his aim.

Although setting guards over sickbeds was a common practice, the remission letters suggest that some family members were reluctant to go so far as to chain the mad before they exhibited extreme violent behavior. The need to keep mad people in chains was written into the customary laws of a number of regions of France. Indeed, a few remission letters mention chains provided by the local representative of justice or by the family for people who were known to be mad for a long period of time before their crime. Perrim de Moustier was given chains by the marshal of Pontoise to chain his son.<sup>53</sup> However, after Jehan de Moustier broke out of those chains, Perrim refused to continue to restrain him. Similarly, the remission letter for Jehannecte

50 ANJJ 146 fo 65 no 129.

51 ANJJ 158 fo 165 no 303: 'ou temps de sa vie par intervalles et aucune fois de longs a longs este furoieux'.

52 ANJJ 158 fo 165 no 303: 'pour lui tenir compaigne afin de le garder'.

53 ANJJ 118 fo 18v no 18.

Troppé stated that her husband refused to chain her, hoping she would return to her 'bon sens' and life in their household would go back to normal. Both of these men were ultimately victims of violent, frenzied attacks by their son and wife, respectively, and the composers of the remission letters, with knowledge of the ultimate outcome, blamed the victim to some extent for refusing to ensure that the mad person could not become so violent.

Chaining the mad could backfire, however, especially since some cases of madness were seen as cyclical. Guille Crieusch's wife was out of her senses such that, he claimed, he feared she would do something bad. In 1411, he applied to the duke of Burgundy, who had jurisdiction over Guille's town of Houille near Amiens, requesting and receiving a license to constrain his wife. He kept her locked up for six weeks, after which she appeared to return to her good senses, and even 'sometimes went to church and did her work as other women do'.<sup>54</sup> She seemed so well recovered, Guille explained, that he left her alone one evening with their children. After he left, she picked up an ax or 'another utensil with a sharp point'<sup>55</sup> and killed one of their children and chased the others, who cried loudly enough to bring the neighbors to the house. Interestingly, perhaps because Guille's wife was registered as mad and he was supposed to be responsible for preventing her from doing anything wrong, it was Guille who was brought before the justice to account for the crime, and was, he claimed, in danger of being banished for not taking sufficient care of his mad wife, forcing the neighbors to intervene to save his children.

The cyclical nature of some forms of madness made any sort of guard a difficult prospect. During their periods of sanity, mad people were allowed to return to their normal lives, and many remission letters established that the person had suffered from bouts of insanity, but was considered recovered, and therefore was unguarded, when the madness returned and the crime was committed. Cases of suicide described elaborate ruses the mad person set up to send everyone away from the house so he or she was no longer being guarded. Keeping the mad from harming themselves or others through restraints or surveillance was not easy, then, but seeking a cure could be even more difficult.

Attempts to cure madness most often involved visits to saints' shrines.<sup>56</sup> Often, the mad would be taken to several shrines when a cure was not

54 ANJJ 166 fo 64 no 100: 'aloit aucuneffoiz aleglise et faisoit sa besongne comme les autres femmes font'.

55 ANJJ 166 fo 64 no 100: 'autre ostil dun charpoint'.

56 In his study of miracle stories, Sigal 1985, pp. 236–239, conflates possession and madness, but notes that 91% of the cures took place in the presence of the saint or of the saint's relics.

forthcoming. Just as shrine records sometimes included stories of failed medical cures that were triumphed over by the successful spiritual cure,<sup>57</sup> remission letters tell us about ultimately unsuccessful pilgrimages. Although there were saints considered particularly good at curing madness, most of the pilgrimages recorded in remission letters were focused locally, at shrines close to home. This is unsurprising, particularly when one considers the potential difficulties of traveling with a mad person. Foucault's image of solitary mad people wandering the roads and waterways of Europe on their way to shrines is not supported by the evidence in these letters, which suggests rather that pilgrimages would be undertaken in groups of at least two, including one healthy individual, generally a member of the family. Indeed, as Irina Metzler notes in her study of disability in medieval Europe, many miracle seekers traveled with the aid of others.<sup>58</sup>

Several of the saints known for curing madness were French saints, so they were ideally located for more local pilgrimages. Saint Mathurin of Larchant's shrine is seventy-eight kilometers (forty-nine miles) south of Paris. Charles VI's queen, Isabeau de Bavière, stopped there in 1416 on a lengthier pilgrimage, possibly to pray for her husband's health.<sup>59</sup> One remission letter from 1422 described a pilgrimage to St. Mathurin undertaken by a mad man and his relatives.<sup>60</sup> Guille Cliquet lived in Talon-Judas near Saint-Pere-le-Moustier, about 157 kilometers (ninety-eight miles) from St. Mathurin de Larchant and 228 kilometers (142 miles) from Paris. In the letter written on his behalf, his relatives and close family explained that he

had been furious and out of his senses for some time and for diverse intervals. Because of these things he was put in irons, chained, and taken to Saint Mathurin of Larchant and on other pilgrimages and sometimes he came to convalescence and afterwards he fell back into his lunacy. The which Cliquet, when he is in health, is a very good, diligent laborer and a man of great care.<sup>61</sup>

57 Ronald Finucane 1977, p. 59, found that one in ten pilgrims to shrines in England had sought medical aid previously. See also an interesting combination: the physician-saint Gil de Santarem in McCleery 2005.

58 Metzler 2006, pp. 169–176.

59 Verdier 1969, p. 33.

60 ANJJ 171 fo 292 no 520.

61 ANJJ 171 fo 292 no 520: 'ait este furieux et hors de son sens par aucuns temps et par divers intervalles pour occasion desquel choses il aeste enferre lie et meue asaint mathurin de larchant et en autres pelerinages et aucunefoiz en est venu a convalescence et depuis par lunoisons y est rancheu le quel cliquet quant il est en sante est un tresbon laboureur diligent et homme de grant peine'.

Guille Cliquet's illness was considered cyclical, and related to the phases of the moon. While his family tried to find a resolution to the problem by taking him on multiple pilgrimages, even the saints could only aid him for a time before he would again fall into madness.

However, despite the failure of holy remedies, Guille Cliquet was a diligent worker during his periods of sanity. The letter further revealed that Guille lived in a household with his brothers, who held their beasts in common, providing an environment in which Guille could work when he was able, and presumably supporting him, along with his wife and children, when he was not. Indeed, the crime that led his relatives to seek remission for him was intimately involved in the household arrangements. A group of soldiers came through town, appropriating the local beasts and destroying outbuildings.<sup>62</sup> While they were at Guille Cliquet's home, they tore down the household's stone well. According to the letter, Cliquet was at this time 'in his senses', but he was naturally very angry, and set about repairing the well the evening the soldiers left town, with his son holding a candle to provide light for the task. Fortunately, many of their cattle had been saved because their valet, Guille Talart, had taken them into the hills to hide, and he also returned to the household that night. As Cliquet's relatives described the scene in his letter of remission, Talart insisted on taking the light Cliquet was using, going so far as to wrest it from Cliquet's son's hands. Cliquet, who was already angered by the actions of the soldiers, entered into his fury and attacked Talart, giving him a wound from which he eventually died. The healing powers of the saint were not sufficient to prevent Cliquet from acting out of proportion to the situation.

Jehan de Moustier, whose story is detailed in Chapter Two, was also taken to a saint's shrine and was disruptive while there.<sup>63</sup> His father, Perrim, took him to the shrine of Saint Titenerd at Gournay, north of their home in Saint-Denis. At the saint's shrine, Jehan de Moustier was chained up and left to await God's mercy, but he escaped from those chains and ran away. When he was recaptured, his family returned him to the shrine where they applied two sets of chains, but even this was not enough to hold Jehan, who had strength enough to escape from those as well. Clearly, the saint was not able to provide a cure at this time, and Perrim de Moustier took him back home.

62 I discuss some aspects of this case in Pfau 2013b.

63 Finucane 1977, pp. 107–109, also describes the disruptive behavior of mad people at saint's shrines, which seems to have been a common theme in miracle records as well as in remission letters.

The *Chronicle of Saint Denis* described the successful cure of a disruptive madman at Saint Denis's shrine. It is worth contrasting the successful community healing ritual described by a monk with the unsuccessful rituals seen in remission letters. Again, the pilgrimage was a local one, so it was the man's neighbors who brought him to the shrine and witnessed the cure:

[f]or a certain baker of the city of St. Denis had lost his inner sense, and captured by a demon, foaming and crying with a terrible voice, any who wanted to approach him or come to him, like an ungoverned savage beast, he tried to tear into morsels with great ferocity. So his relatives and neighbors led him, bound with iron chains, to the church of the holy martyr, and placed him before the image of the crucifix. They said prayers and his mad fury calmed a little. Then they guided him before the altar of the martyr, where for a little while he lay down on the ground, as if separated from his bodily senses. Suddenly from his mouth a fetid breath exited, and then getting up with hilarity, on bended knees, he gave thanks to God and to the glorious martyr, affirming publicly to all that he through invocation of the saint recovered his whole health.<sup>64</sup>

His family and neighbors brought him to the shrine in hopes of recovery, perhaps especially because the baker held an important economic position within the local community. The image of communal involvement the chronicler paints here is compelling. These 'family and neighbors' were actively involved in helping him to get to the shrine, binding him and dragging him along with them. Together, the mad man and the saint helped to initiate and confirm communal unity.

Just because other people aided in the pilgrimage does not mean that everyone was supportive, caring, and understanding of mad pilgrims. Indeed, just as remission letters reveal failed pilgrimages, they also uncover

64 Bellaguet 1842, vol. 1, pp. 314–316: 'Quidam namque panificus de villa beati Dyonisii sensum penitus amiserat, et arreptus a demone, spumans ac terribilibus vocibus clamans, volentes ad ipsum accedere vel eidem occurrentes, velud effrenis belua, ferocissimis morsibus conabatur discindere. Quem cum cathena ferrea ligatum amici et vicini ad ecclesiam beati martiris attulissent, coram ymagine crucifixi, oracionibus factis, aliquantulum vesanum impetum deposuit. Deinde eum ante altare martiris perducentes, cum super pavimentum aliquandiu jacuisset, velud a corporeis sensibus segregatus, subito ex ore ejus anhelitus fetidissimus exivit, et tunc hylariter surgens, flexis genibus, gracias Deo egit et glorioso martiri, publice cunctis affirmans quod ejus precibus receperat integram sanitatem'.

failed attempts at cementing civic unity. One case in particular provides evidence that not all miracle seekers were fortunate enough to have a considerate network of family and neighbors. Instead, a stranger verbally and physically abused Margot, who was suffering from the malady of Saint John, often called Saint John's Dance.<sup>65</sup> According to a letter written in 1379 on behalf of Jehan Dargilles, a bystander who came to her defense, Margot arrived at the church of Saint John the Baptist in Sens on the saint's feast day (24 June) with a group of others suffering from the dancing sickness. Standing in front of the shrine of Saint John, Margot 'burdened and much aggrieved by the said illness, took the candles placed before the image of the said Saint John and broke them, destroyed them, and threw them to the ground like an insensible person without reason'.<sup>66</sup> Another resident of Sens, Huguenin Vice Serviter, took offense at Margot's actions and verbally abused her, saying that if he met her outside the church he would hit her. Jehan Dargilles 'moved by pity for the said Margot, for consideration and compassion of her said illness, strongly blamed the said Serviter for the words and threats that he had said and made to the said Margot'.<sup>67</sup> Although the two men left the church peaceably enough, they met later in the street and began a brawl that led to Huguenin Vice Serviter's death at Jehan Dargilles' hands.

In their attempts to cure the mad the community preferred religious to medical aid. Though madness was certainly seen as a malady, and even described in humoral terms, remission letters rarely mention active medical intervention. Only one letter out of the 155 examined mentioned medicine as instrumental in curing a mad person, and even in this case the reference is ambiguous. In his madness, Robert Layne would go out into the woods

65 There were several outbreaks of the dancing sickness in the Middle Ages and into the early modern period. E. Louis Backman 1977, pp. 170–258, discusses them all in detail. On pages 190–216 he discusses an epidemic in 1374 in Flanders, Germany, and France, and argues on pages 303–327 that the dancers in all these epidemics actually suffered from ergot poisoning. He does not mention any outbreaks in 1379, and in fact tends to argue that any chronicles providing alternative dates to the dates of the larger outbreaks were mistaken, perhaps in order to strengthen his argument about ergotism. Erik Midelfort 1999, pp. 32–49, also discusses Saint Vitus's Dance, which is a later incarnation of the dancing sickness (the name St. Vitus's Dance does not appear until the sixteenth century).

66 ANJJ 115 fo 73 no 154: 'chargee et mout agreuse du dit mal prenent les chandelle mises devant lymage du dit saint jehan et les cussart desrompoit et gectoit a terre comme personne insensee et sans raison'.

67 ANJJ 115 fo 73 no 154: 'meu de pitie envers la dite margot pour consideracion et compassion de sa dite maladie blasma fortement le dit serviter de parolles et menaces quil avoit dites et faites ala dite margot'.

naked with rocks in his hands and threaten to kill anyone who came near him, so that

no one dared to approach him except the Seigneur and Dame de Camp-ergny who thus brought him to live in their hostel. He took him or had him taken and tied him or had him tied such that by medicine or otherwise in the custody of God he came back to himself and had cognizance.<sup>68</sup>

Once he was brought home, he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Saint Acorée. In the end, however, neither the medical nor the religious cure was sufficient, since, according to his remission letter from 1387, any time he was angered he would become uncontrollable and frenetic. Physicians were never called in as experts to provide proof of madness, although they were called as witnesses for other physical illnesses,<sup>69</sup> and in the fourteenth century physicians were brought into the court to provide testimony in the form of prognosis for the injured party, determining whether or not the wounds were likely to prove fatal.<sup>70</sup>

Family care was clearly considered a better option than prison, where (at least according to the rhetoric of the remission letters) the prisoner was likely to die, whether or not he or she was ultimately convicted. Although care within the household could involve chains and cells, it could also involve pilgrimages or treatments to seek a cure that would have been unavailable in prison. In addition, a mad person who recovered could be returned to his or her previous position. Because medieval people believed madness was a disease from which people could and did recover, and because most of these remission letters were written for people who had contributed to the support of their immediate families before they became mad, it is likely they were closely observed in the hopes they would recover.

However, even if caring for the mad within the household was preferable, it was certainly not without its own pitfalls. Indeed, sometimes the stress of caring for the mad was enough to bring a household to a point of crisis. Jacquet Morniet's sister-in-law became so annoyed about having to care for him while he was bed-ridden with melancholy in 1459 that she made the

68 AN JJ 131 fo 103 no 166. Edited in Saunier 1993, p. 498: 'par ce nul ne l'osoit aprouchier se ne fust le Seigneur et Dame de Campergny qui ainsi comme il se vint bouter en leur hostel ilz le poindrent ou firent prendre et le lièrent ou firent lier tant que par médecine ou aultrement que à la garde de Dieu il se revint et ot cognoissance'.

69 AN JJ 171 no 411. Edited in Longnon 1878, p. 17. Note that Longnon does not provide folio references.

70 Tanon 1877, pp. 18–19.

mistake of berating him, calling him worthless and lazy.<sup>71</sup> Enraged, Jacquet hit her with a stick and killed her. This remission letter is an excellent example of the optimism of the composers of remission letters. Jacquet's family asked for his release so he could help care for his wife and children. Yet before his crime, he was unable to support himself and was relying on his brother's charity. This fraternal care would presumably not be forthcoming after his release, however, since his brother was instrumental in his arrest. Jacquet's family must have been hoping (or expecting) he would recover from his illness and become a useful member of the community once more, despite the unpleasant results of his dependence on his brother.

This negative response of household members to caring for the mad was not unusual. A letter composed in 1482 on behalf of Regnaulde des Vieulx, twenty-four or twenty-five year-old widow of Pierre Pelletier, explained that she had been living in the household of her husband's parents after his death. In addition to Regnaulde and her child, the household included her father-in-law, his daughter, Begnoiste, and her husband, Odile Deleslang. Begnoiste, who was only fourteen years old, was described in the letter as 'foolish and insensible, and not pleasing to the said Odile',<sup>72</sup> who was more interested in the older widow. Odile and Regnaulde began to have an affair, and Odile suggested that he should kill Begnoiste so they could marry. In the remission letter written on her behalf, Regnaulde claimed to have protested against this plan, but agreed that if by chance Begnoiste were to die, she would be happy to be Odile's wife. When Begnoiste was discovered drowned in a nearby fountain, Odile left town, thereby confirming his culpability, since the choice of voluntary exile was equivalent to an admission of guilt. When the officers of Neuilly came to question Regnaulde, the private lives of the Pelletier household became public knowledge.

The remission letters narrated the discomforts of dealing with mad people, along with the attempts made to help them. These awkward figures threatened their communal and kinship ties, but at the same time they could be used as symbols of and cement for those same bonds. Mad people were expected to recover and reaffirm their identities as integral parts of the larger community. The attempts made to hasten that recovery through pilgrimage or to guard the mad to prevent them from harming themselves or others placed the mad person at the center of communal concern. This communal concern was perhaps most clear in a particular type of crime narrative that began to appear in the middle of the fifteenth century, in

71 AN JJ 188 fo 102 no 203.

72 AN JJ 209 fo 61 no 104: 'folle et incensee et nestoit pas ala plaisance dudit odile'.

which the mad person became an impetus for vigilante justice, not as its victim, but as its cause.

### III. Acts of Communal Justice: Sorcerers and Remission

Towards the middle of the fifteenth century, a new narrative phenomenon began to appear in the remission letters. These letters were written on behalf of individuals and, often, large groups of people guilty of murder, who insisted that their victims were 'renowned' sorcerers.<sup>73</sup> These accusations of sorcery and bewitchment, nonexistent in the earlier letters, included references to proofs of the sorcerer's power in the community, describing cases of impotence, infertility, and madness.<sup>74</sup> The supplicants generally sought remission for what they presented as a cooperative effort to interrogate the accused sorcerer, leading to the sorcerer's death from exposure or other 'natural' causes.

The descriptions of behavior of those driven mad through sorcery could be distinctively different from that of those whose madness was attributed to other causes. Some victims of sorcery are depicted unthreateningly, as 'madly running naked through the fields',<sup>75</sup> and one letter connected the bewitched man's impotence to his madness,<sup>76</sup> but often the letters voiced a fear that this madness caused by bewitchment would lead the victim to take his or her own life.<sup>77</sup> These letters had a very different focus from those composed for mad criminals. Although there are a few exceptions where the mad person lashed out at the accused sorcerer, most letters seek forgiveness for family members who sought to remove the bewitchment through actions that 'accidentally' resulted in the accused sorcerer's death. Therefore, the mad were incidental to the crime, and these bewitched mad people appeared as much more sympathetic figures than the mad who committed crimes themselves. These narratives inverted the typical themes of madness, where a family member was the victim of a criminal attack by the mad, into a story of the family member as the active participant in an act of violence focused outside the family circle on a 'renowned' sorcerer.

73 I have written more on the subject of attacks on sorcerers in Pfau 2013a.

74 For more on the connection between impotence, magic, and witchcraft, see Rider 2006, pp. 186–207.

75 ANJJ 187 fo 89v no 173 (in 1457): 'courroit folle parmy les champs toute nue'.

76 ANJJ 208 fo 11 no 20 (in 1480).

77 See ANJJ 199 fo 276 no 441 (in 1464); ANJJ 227 fo 32 no 62 (in 1496).

In a letter composed in 1496, Petit Jehan Secretani described the events that led him to kill Estienne Mollet.<sup>78</sup> Petit Jehan's sister, Jehanne, had married three years before and immediately 'fallen into a great misfortune of sickness such that she was strongly troubled in her sense and understanding and was completely senseless and in danger each day of harming herself and the fruit with which at that time she was pregnant'.<sup>79</sup> According to the letter, this illness meant her family could have no joy together. Petit Jehan saw the source of her madness outside the immediate family, but nevertheless linked to her through fellowship. Estienne Mollet, known by the community as a sorcerer able to cure a number of diseases, was often in the company of their father, Estienne Secretani, and with access to Jehanne's food, which Petit Jehan Secretani believed he had poisoned. The simultaneous rupturing and cementing of familial and community ties were stressed throughout this letter, as Petit Jehan joined Jehanne's brother-in-law, Laurens Grenault, in beating up Estienne Mollet while demanding he give them information about the bewitchment of their sister.

Studies of witchcraft accusations in diverse locations have noted that, while the educated inquisitors and judges were most concerned with the question of worship of the devil, most accusers were focused on the details of the evil deeds performed through magic.<sup>80</sup> The social aspects of magical acts, rather than a theological insistence on heretical beliefs, were important to those who brought cases against their neighbors. While the dangers of heresy in the community were certainly clear to the inquisitors, since heretics were believed to seek converts and could thus corrupt their neighbors, the dangers of sorcery were obvious to all, since they actively worked to attack their neighbors. Norman Cohn argues that the lack of witchcraft accusations in the Middle Ages was due not to a lack of belief in popular culture, but rather to the legal system of 'talion', whereby the accuser, if unable to convince the judge of the guilt of the accused, would suffer as heavy a penalty as fit the crime. He cites the evidence of lynchings from the ninth century into the eleventh to prove there was a widespread belief in witchcraft before the

78 ANJJ 227 fo 32 no 62 (in 1496).

79 ANJJ 227 fo 32 no 62: 'cheult en grant inconvenient de maladie tellement quelle fut fort troublee de son sens et entendement et estoit toute incensee et en dangier de chacun jour precipiter elle et le fruit dont pour lors estoit ensaincte'.

80 Edward Peters 2002, p. 218, notes for the fourteenth century: 'In secular courts generally, jurists looked for damage actually caused by sorcery; in ecclesiastical courts canonists looked for indications that sorcery was practised by means that clearly savoured of heresy, especially the homage paid to demons in return for magical powers'. See also Briggs 1989; Briggs 1996; Cohn 1975; Karlsen 1987.

trials.<sup>81</sup> Significantly, however, the fifteenth-century French remission letters about the killing of sorcerers (or the accidental death of people rumored to be sorcerers) appear in the archive even after witchcraft trials had already begun in parts of Switzerland and eastern France.<sup>82</sup>

The devil had a strong presence in letters of remission at least from Charles V's reign, which marks the beginning of this study. The 'temptation of the enemy' did not excuse an action, but it did provide a reasonable motivational force for the crime. Natalie Zemon Davis, in her study of later remission letters, notes that the phrase was no longer in use in the sixteenth century.<sup>83</sup> The coincidence of an increasing interest in the connection of the devil with sorcery and witchcraft in this period suggests that the 'temptation of the enemy' may have become a more troubling claim in the sixteenth century than in the fifteenth. It was still occasionally used in oral depositions at trials, but the more composed format of the remission letters perhaps edited out such references.

Jean Gerson and other fourteenth-century theologians interested in the discernment of spirits believed that possession, whether by God or by the devil, manifested itself in behavior very similar to madness.<sup>84</sup> The concern of these theologians was to determine which of the three possibilities was in fact occurring in a particular case and to act accordingly, whether to beatify, exorcise, or call a physician.<sup>85</sup> Fifteenth-century scholars shifted attention to the capabilities of sorcerers, rather than the direct actions of the devil.

81 Cohn 1975, pp. 160–163.

82 Paravy 1979. Bernard Gui's inquisitorial manual in the early fourteenth century mentions witchcraft, but he never convicted any witches. See Cohn 1975, p. 131. Nicolas Eymerich wrote his *Directorium Inquisitorum* in 1376. His manual for inquisitors discussed witchcraft, but only as one among many heresies. His focus was on the distinction between *dulie* and *latrerie* of the devil, or worship (which is due only to God) and veneration (which is applicable to the saints). These two different levels of heretical behavior in the practice of sorcery determined the appropriate punishment for the sorcerer. Jean Gerson's treatise written in 1402, *De erroribus circa artem magicam*, circulated with the appended articles condemning magic by the University of Paris in 1398.

83 Davis 1987, p. 37. See also the corresponding endnote number 6 on pages 169–170.

84 Gerson 1962, vol. 3, p. 39.

85 Most modern work on this topic has been more interested in the first two possibilities. See Caciola 2003; Caciola 2000; Newman 1998. However, madness was also a viable diagnosis. Friar Felix Fabri wrote of a visit to a small town in Germany: 'In the village of Jedensheim, or Iheidensheim, at the foot of the hill on which the castle stands, there was a maiden bereft of her reason, whom many declared to be possessed of a devil; he showed me this maiden for me to look at and examine, that I might decide what was to be done with her; whether she ought to be exorcised or not. My decision was that she was out of her mind, and therefore fitter to be entrusted to the care of physicians than to that of theologians'. Fabri 1896, vol. 1, p. 56.

Sorcerers were believed capable not only of channeling demonic possession, but also of causing physical illnesses, including madness, through potions and spells. Johan Nider wrote his *Formicarius* sometime around 1437. In this treatise, he explained miraculous and marvelous events, introduced with brief allegorical interpretations of the behavior of ants.<sup>86</sup> In Book Five, Chapter Three, the Theologian presented to his interrogator, the Lazy One, the kinds of damages sorcerers can inflict through their demons. He explained:

[t]hen, the first manner works to create in a man an illicit love for a woman or in the contrary sense, in a woman for a man. Another serves to provoke hatred or jealousy in someone. The third is found in those who are called ensorcelled, because the men and women cannot use their generative force. The fourth manner is to make a man suffer in one of his members. The fifth deprives him of his life. The sixth deprives him of the use of his reason. The seventh is to harm him by attacking his goods or his animals.<sup>87</sup>

This list of harmful acts reflects an intense concern about reproduction, relationships, and household resources, as well as a fear of attacks on the individual. Unlike the general run of heretics, sorcerers were visibly damaging to the community, regardless of whether they were actively recruiting. Nider listed deeply threatening powers over people's relationships with others, since sorcerers could control love, hatred, or jealousy, all of which could be instilled in another person without cause or reference to the ordinary balance of the community. Equally, an inability to reproduce threatened the continuity of a household, and through that household of the community as a whole, just as the destruction of property and household resources did.

Similarly, loss of reason was a serious threat to the cohesiveness of the community, since mad people were perceived as likely to attack ties of

86 Chène 1999, p. 106. The titles of the five books are *Libellus primus principaliter erit de rariorum hominum exemplis et operacionibus*, *Secundus de verisimilibus bonis revelacionibus*, *Tercius de falsis et illusoriis visionibus*, *Quartus de virtuosius perfectorum operacionibus*, *Quintus de maleficis et eorum decepcionibus*.

87 Nider 1999, pp. 148–149: 'Unus igitur modus est quo amorem malum ingerunt viro alicui ad mulierem aliquam, vel mulieri ad virum. Alius est cum odium vel invidiam in aliquo seminare procurant. Tercius est in his qui maleficiati dicuntur, ne vi generativa uti valeant ad feminam vel viceversa femelle ad virum. Quartus est cum in membro aliquo hominem egrotare faciunt. Quintus cum vita privant. Sextus quando usu rationis aliquem privant. Septimus cum quocumque predictorum modorum aliquem in suis rebus vel animalibus'.

community and kinship, thus furthering the larger goal of the sorcerer. In the end, attacking an individual's life or body parts seems the least disruptive possibility.

It may be theologically significant that Nider chose to say sorcerers could deprive a person of the 'use of his reason', not actually deprive him of his reason. Although the sorcerer was able to create an impediment to using reason, they were not able to actively threaten a person's reason. Indeed, Nider provided an exemplum about the judge Pierre in Berne, who was injured by means of sorcery. Pierre was generally quite careful about protecting himself with his faith and constant signing of the cross, but one night he woke up in the middle of the night and left himself open to the devil. Believing it was morning due to some 'fictive light', he went downstairs and found the front door locked. Angered at his attendants, he returned up the stairs cursing, saying 'In the name of the devil'. Immediately, Pierre fell back down the stairs onto his head. He was found 'deprived of the use of his reason, wounded everywhere and bleeding profusely'.<sup>88</sup> This story was used by Nider to demonstrate that even holy men, despite their best efforts, can slip up occasionally, allowing sorcerers and the devil access to them. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect is that Pierre's wounds and loss of reason were by-products of the sorcerer's act, which was to make him trip on the stairs. Although sorcerers had the power to wound people remotely, they were also capable of taking advantage of dangerous situations. Pierre eventually regained the use of his reason through God's grace, and recovered from his other wounds.

Heinrich Institoris, who wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1484, was heavily influenced by Nider's work.<sup>89</sup> He also explained that witches were capable of inflicting illness on their victims. Institoris, however, was particularly intent on proving that witches could cause epilepsy and leprosy, because, as he pointed out, physicians claimed these diseases generally arose from longstanding preconditions, and therefore were unlikely to be contracted through supernatural means.<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, in his discussion of how sorcerers could cause illnesses, he devoted relatively little space to madness, merely stating '[t]he situation with harming the use of reason and harassing the internal senses is made clear through the case of the

88 Nider 1999, pp. 190–193: 'luce deceptus ficticia'; 'In nomine dyaboli'; 'privatum rationis usu iacentem et collisum per omnia membra, sanguinem plurimum e corpore emittentem'.

89 For more on the *Malleus* and its wider influence, see Broedel 2003. There is a scholarly debate on whether Jacobus Sprenger coauthored the *Malleus*. See Maxwell-Stuart 2007, pp. 30–31.

90 Institoris and Sprenger 2006, vol. 2, p. 311.

possessed and “stricken,” as well as by Gospel stories.<sup>91</sup> Thus, sorcery could cause madness, since it was clear the devil could cause cases of possession by targeting a person’s ‘use of reason’.

The narratives in letters of remission about witchcraft revolved around issues of trust, threat, and reputation in the community. They revealed and simultaneously sought to mend deep fissures in the ideals of communal support. The mad person, along with other perceived victims of malefaction, became the central figures of a narrative of communal reconstruction at the expense of the reputed sorcerer. However, the letters also illuminate the roles that sorcerers were expected and even, occasionally, required to play in the neighborhood. Generally, these sorcerers were sought out originally on the pretext of desiring magical healing, not because they were immediately presumed to be the cause of the illness. It was only after the sorcerer’s attempts failed, or he or she<sup>92</sup> refused to help, that the narratives escalated into violence.<sup>93</sup> Like the mad person in narratives of mad crime, the sorcerer had a role to play that was acceptable in certain prescribed ways.

In 1464, Jehan Sommet, a notary living in the town of Thiart in Auvergne, sought remission for the crime of murder. He described his troubling night on the twelfth or thirteenth of June, when his wife ‘was greatly troubled in her sense and understanding, crying with a loud voice as if insensible, and wishing to throw herself out the windows into the street’.<sup>94</sup> Jehan Sommet explained that he called his neighbors to aid him in guarding his wife and preventing her from doing herself harm. He claimed he made a number of vows, to both male and female saints, on his wife’s behalf, but they did not

91 Institoris and Sprenger 2006, vol. 2, p. 307; The Latin is from Institoris and Sprenger, vol. 1, p. 457: ‘Item de nocumento vsus rationis et vexatione interiorum sensuum probatur ex possessis et arrepticis, per euangelicas etiam historias’.

92 Despite the preponderance of female witches elsewhere, in France, at least in the early period, the ratio seems to be less skewed. Alfred Soman 1992, p. x, also found this to be the case in the *écrou*s of the Conciergerie du Palais, the prison of the Parlement of Paris. He also found that very few accused sorcerers were killed.

93 The sorcerers’ social position appears in some ways similar to that of the Jews studied by David Nirenberg 1996. He argues that outbreaks of violence against Jews were deeply embedded in specific social, political, and ideological conflicts that were locally based. In fact, Nirenberg suggests that coexistence was predicated on just such occasional outbreaks of violence, which could dissolve the tensions of everyday life. This argument casts new light onto considerations of ‘othering’, violence, and community, suggesting that persecution did not intend to purify, but to enable cohabitation. It is also worth noting, as Miri Rubin 1999 points out, that violent episodes against the Jews were not only localized and particular, but also manipulated and comprehended through narrative constructions.

94 AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: ‘fut fort trouble de son sens et entement crient a haulte voix comme incensee soy voulant gecter par les fenestres en la rue’.

help her. Upset about his wife's continued frenzy, Jehan Sommet began asking his 'neighbors and other people'<sup>95</sup> where this illness could come from, and if they knew of any possible remedy. The response, which was presented as universal, rather than attributed to one particular source, was that his wife had been poisoned by an old, 90-year-old woman in the town, named either Guillaume or Guillemete de Pigeules called Turlateuse, 'held and reputed to be a great sorcerer and a bad woman'.<sup>96</sup> The helpful, but anonymous, voices of Jehan Sommet's 'neighbors and other people' further informed him that only Turlateuse could provide a remedy for her poisons, and that he would have to ask the sorcerer 'nicely' (*doulcement*) to heal his wife. If Turlateuse refused, Jehan's advisors continued, he should 'warm the soles of her feet', because on other occasions, she had healed people of similar poisons and illnesses because of threats and beatings.<sup>97</sup>

Armed with this helpful advice, Jehan Sommet and two of his wife's brothers, Hugues Vachon and Jehan Cavart, went to the home of Turlateuse on the ninth of August, two months after his wife had first begun to exhibit these symptoms. The three men asked Turlateuse to help Jehan Sommet's wife by healing her or providing an antidote to the poisons, but, according to the letter, she refused to do so. Naturally, they proceeded to apply a hot iron to her feet in an effort to force her to help them, adding in a few beatings around her neck with a stick. When Turlateuse remained obstinate in her refusal to help them, they departed, each one back to his own home. However, two days later, Jehan Sommet's wife worsened, becoming more frenzied than before. In his anger, Jehan Sommet called together his four closest friends, the same two brothers of his wife and two other men, Jehan Grasser and Pierre Jobert, and informed them that, to heal his wife, they were going to take Turlateuse out of her home that night and burn her feet. When one of his henchmen protested that perhaps Turlateuse's neighbors would bring them to justice for breaking into her house, Jehan Sommet replied that all her neighbors knew she was a bad woman, and would not meddle with them. He returned home to his sick wife, who was being watched by several neighbors, but his friends went to Turlateuse's home, where they found her 'naked' in her bed. They took her to a nearby churchyard, where they beat her with sticks so hard that she fell on the ground, and kept beating her until she told them Jehan Sommet's wife had recovered. One of the perpetrators went to Jehan Sommet's house to verify Turlateuse's

95 AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: 'a ses voisins et a autres personnes'.

96 AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: 'tenus et repputee estre grant sorciere et mauvaise femme'.

97 AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: 'luy chauffast les solles des piez'.

statement, where he found the woman's health improved. Jehan went to the churchyard and found Turlateuse lying still on the ground. He claimed later he was very angry to find that his friends had beaten the sorcerer so badly, and he insisted she be carried back to her home. One of his friends did so, but, finding the door locked, left her, still naked, on the doorstep, where she was found the next morning, dead.

In some cases, mad people themselves, rather than only their relatives, were involved in gathering together a posse of like-minded individuals to 'interrogate' a renowned sorcerer. Guille Moler, in his letter of remission from 1452, claimed he was pulled out of bed one Saturday evening at eight o'clock by Jaures Menefevre, who asked Guille to join him and Thogny de la Villate, who was waiting for them with Beguite Clote. There is no indication in the letter of any kin relationship between these three men. Beguite 'as it is said, had ensorcelled the said Thogny and made him languish in a certain illness by virtue of certain evil arts such that he had lost his good, natural senses and that he was out of good memory'.<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, Thogny, despite believing Beguite was the cause of his illness, had asked her to heal him, which she promised to do but never managed. When the three men confronted her with rigorous words, she refused to help Thogny, so they beat her with 'little' sticks until she finally agreed to heal him. According to Guille's letter, the three men then left her alone, and she decided to sleep under a tree, where she may have taken cold, or possibly been more severely injured than they had thought, because she died the same night and her body was found under the tree the next morning.

Guitiere des Ganes' letter of remission demonstrates the general fear of sorcerers. Guitiere was eighteen years old in 1469, when she became involved in what reads as a complicated and fraught household arrangement. It is unclear from the letter exactly how Guitiere was involved in the household of Remond Robin, but it seems likely she was a servant. Remond Robin was married to Michelle Peronne, and the couple lived with their daughter, Jehanne Robine, and her husband, Roger Colmet, who had come into the household originally as a servant. Remond Robin became aware that his wife did not take good care of her children, and became so angry about it that he ended up bedridden from illness. Michelle Peronne moved out of their communal home. At this point in the narrative, Guitiere was

98 AN JJ 181 fo 67v no 123: 'come len disoit avoit ensorcele ledit thogny et le fait languer en certaine maladie par vertu de certain mauvais art tellement quil en avoit perdu son bon sens naturel et quil en estoit hors de bonne memoire'.

reintroduced, arguing that she did not dare to do anything to anger Michelle Peronne because she believed Michelle had caused her brother to become mad by making him eat the brains of a cat. The narrative suggests some intervention by a notary questioning this statement, because the letter's flow was interrupted to explain that 'the said supplicant presumed this because this Michelle had, around the feast of Easter last, treated the brain of a cat and given it to her daughter to give to the said Roger to bring him so that he would become mad'.<sup>99</sup> The madness of her brother worked as an insurance of her cooperation, according to Guitiere, so that she had no choice but to join Michelle Peronne and Jehanne Robine when they went to Roger Colmet's house and murdered him in his bed. According to the letter, Michelle Peronne had already confessed to all of her own crimes, and had exonerated Guitiere and Jehanne.

These cases involving sorcery, much like those that mention failed pilgrimages, demonstrate the desire for action on the part of the family and relatives of the mad. They were not willing to merely accept madness as a just punishment from God or as a natural illness that had to be endured. Their search for a solution to the problem that madness posed reached outwards, to things in their control. Many scholars writing about witchcraft have considered the cathartic value of the witch as a scapegoat for larger problems in the community.<sup>100</sup> Rather than target the mad to prevent such problematic crimes, some communities chose to protect them, reintegrating mad people and, in the process, channeling that potential towards recognized and 'renowned' outsiders.

#### IV. Understanding the Mad

In most cases, madness was recognized as an illness with no clear external cause. Faced with a family member whose actions were so disruptive, many narratives tried to understand what might motivate a mad person to commit a crime, focusing on the misinterpretation of circumstances that might cause them to react inappropriately. These ranged from simple or complex misunderstandings in the moment to long term refusals to accept the truth of a situation.

99 ANJJ 196 fo 72 no 127: 'ce presupposist ladite suppliant par ce que icelle michelle environ la feste de pasques dernier ladite michelle avoit trait la cervelle dun chat et baille a sa fille pour bailler donner audit roger amena affin quil devensist fol'.

100 Briggs 1989; Briggs 1996; Roper 2004; Roper 1994.

Guillaume Audoy, whose case is briefly described in Chapter One, fell off a ladder and hit his head in 1403. Guillaume had been considered an idiot, out of his senses and memory, for two years when he killed his wife while loading manure onto a cart. Believing she was mocking him with her movements 'because he was stupid and idiotic through lack of sense, angered and incensed', he knocked her over with his pitchfork and hit her several times, then drove away with the cart.<sup>101</sup> When he returned and found his wife dead, he was surprised and angry, believing someone else had done it. This description of his actions after murdering his wife further indicated his disturbed mind, since he did not remember killing her and therefore did not flee the scene. The composers of Guillaume Audoy's letter constructed a logical narrative to explain why he would murder his wife and why he did not react to her death in an expected way. His type of permanent stupidity caused by an accident was not considered particularly serious until he committed this crime, since he was still capable of working and had managed to do so for two years without any adverse effects. Nevertheless, his lack of comprehension was dangerous, because he misinterpreted his wife's actions as mocking. His general lack of sense had much more serious repercussions, due to his inability to recognize his wife's actions as those of a woman lifting manure into a cart.

While Guillaume Audoy's misinterpretation was relatively simple, Jehan Massetirer, who suffered from melancholy in 1394, seemed to develop a complex theological misunderstanding. Having fallen ill from a 'natural sickness', Jehan had a candle placed in his hand, indicating he was on his deathbed and receiving extreme unction. It was after he had received the sacrament for the end of life that Jehan Massetirer's natural illness progressed into a state of madness. The madness acted as an extension of the illness, increasing the severity of it and causing him 'because of melancholy of the head' to get up from his sickbed and leave the house.<sup>102</sup> He walked down to the river, planning to drown himself. However, his wife, who was instrumental in seeking the letter of remission, which responded to the supplication of Jehan Massetirer's 'wife and close family',<sup>103</sup> followed him. With the help of two passersby,

101 AN JJ 160 fo 70v no 91, edited in Guérin 1909, vol. 7, pp. 80–82: 'pour ce qu'il estoit sourt et ydiot par non sens, yré et courroucé de ce'.

102 AN JJ 146 fo 65rv no 129: 'maladie naturele'; 'cathandelle en la main cuidant que il deust trespassee vi depuis le lendemain'; 'par merancolie de teste'.

103 AN JJ 146 fo 65rv no 129: 'humble supplicacion de la femme et amis charnelz de feu Jehan Massetirer'.

she pulled him out of the water and asked why he had allowed himself to fall into the river. Jehan Massetirer, 'full of fatuity or of sickness', responded 'that they had sinned greatly in taking him out and that he needed to die'.<sup>104</sup> Although they were able to get Jehan Massetirer back to his house and into his bed, he merely waited until he had been left alone with a neighbor before hitting her over the head and throwing himself into the well to drown.

Jehan Massetirer's desire for death, interpreted by his family as madness, is evocative of an extreme literalism. He 'needed to die', perhaps because he had already received extreme unction. While the assurance that a suicide had been reconciled with God before going mad and seeking death could have been intended merely as a mitigating factor in his or her favor, in this letter it is given an unexpected weight through Jehan Massetirer's speech. The composers of his remission letter opened the possibility that it was the sacrament itself that ultimately led to his death. Interestingly, a similar letter from 1420 did not include madness as a possible reason for someone to commit suicide after receiving extreme unction. Jehan du Puy was so ill that he had made his will, confessed, and received extreme unction before cutting his own throat. The composers of his letter explained his actions by suggesting he committed suicide because of 'temptation of the enemy, because of the oppression of his illness, or from some other cause',<sup>105</sup> but they did not suggest madness or a literal interpretation of the sacrament as an excuse.

In complicated ways, madness was seen as potentially caused by powerful emotions. As the letters about loss of property during the war indicate, grief about loss was a powerful emotion that could cause people to act in unexpected ways. Some remission letter composers went even further, providing explanations that explored the inner workings of a person's mind, focusing on a perceived inability to fulfill familial and household roles, guilt, or familial conflicts as catalysts for madness. While some of these emotions, such as jealousy, anger, and despair, are actually named (*jalousie*, *courroucie*, and *desespere*), others are described in great detail, without being given a specific term to define them. Extremes of emotion were described as moments of inner conflict that could lead to madness.<sup>106</sup>

104 ANJJ 146 fo 65rv no 129: 'le qel plain de fatuite ou de maladie quel avion respondi quilz avoient fait grant pechie de lentue hors et que il ydeuoit mourir'.

105 ANJJ 171 fo 94v no 156: 'pour ce que par temptacion de lennemj pour cause de loppresion de maladie ou autrement il sest coppes la gorge en commectant homicide de lui mesme'.

106 For more on this topic, see my essay, Pfau 2010a.

Barbara Rosenwein contends that historians should ‘worry’ about emotions in history, particularly in the Middle Ages, and offers the term ‘emotional communities’ to help

uncover systems of feeling; what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.<sup>107</sup>

The question of emotions and of enacting emotional responses has been ‘worrying’ medievalists partly in response to Johan Huizinga’s image of a Middle Ages filled with ‘childish emotions’ and Norbert Elias’s suggestion that the sixteenth century saw the development of the ‘civilizing process’ that caused people to repress and restrain their emotions.<sup>108</sup> Stephen Jaeger’s response to Elias moved the civilizing moment back to the tenth century,<sup>109</sup> but more recent work on emotions in the Middle Ages has shifted focus from the ‘civilizing process’ to the ways medieval people used emotional displays for particular goals. Stephen White claims that eleventh-, twelfth-, and thirteenth-century emotions, particularly of anger, were ‘highly conventionalized and socially generated’, and were enacted for specific political strategies.<sup>110</sup> Daniel Smail similarly notes that ‘men and women in Marseille and elsewhere in medieval Europe found it useful to have or autosuggest states of anger and hatred and, perhaps, learned how to perform fictive emotional states if the subcortex refused to cooperate’.<sup>111</sup> Remission letters suggest, however, that while certain emotional displays were considered appropriate and even politically expedient, an excessive display of emotion could be perceived as irrational madness.<sup>112</sup>

107 Rosenwein 2002, p. 842.

108 Elias 1978; Huizinga 1954.

109 Jaeger 1985.

110 Stephen D. White 1998, p. 150.

111 Smail 2003, p. 244.

112 It is, of course, necessary to be cautious when discussing the connections between emotions and rationality in the Middle Ages. After all, the Cartesian separation between the emotional and the rational, and thus the body and the mind, had not yet been formulated. However, perturbation of the ‘passions’ was one of Galen’s six non-naturals, which he understood as causing disruptions in the ideal humoral balance of the individual, and thus as potentially damaging to the senses. See Siraisi 1990, p. 101. In addition, medieval legal treatises, such as Albertanus of Brescia’s *Liber consolationis et consilii*, composed in 1246, believed that extreme emotion could lead to madness (here called *furiosus*), and sought to temper such emotional excess in the quest

In 1460, Guillaume Sunoneau, at the age of thirty-five, composed a letter to the king asking for remission for a crime committed in his youth, some seventeen or eighteen years before. Guillaume explained that at that time 'from temptation of the enemy or otherwise' he had had carnal relations, 'once with a mare and five or six times with a cow'.<sup>113</sup> It is worth pointing out that, if Guillaume was correct about his chronology, he would have been twelve or thirteen when he committed this crime, and thus not of an age where he could have been held legally responsible for his actions.<sup>114</sup> Guillaume gives no excuse for his actions other than the temptation of the devil, and madness does not appear in his life until long afterwards, when he finds himself unable to forget his 'sin'.<sup>115</sup> His feelings of displeasure and anger towards himself for having committed crimes, 'knowing that these were enormous and detestable',<sup>116</sup> served as a catalyst for madness. While these particular sentiments only appear in this letter, they are worth analyzing because this is also the only letter that deals with the connection between sin and madness. None of the letters of remission suggest that sin was a direct cause of madness. Although religious ideas are present in these letters, it is clear that the concept that madness only happened to the sinful did not loom large in the minds of the composers of remission letters.<sup>117</sup> The linkage of sin and madness would have been familiar to a medieval audience from the Biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar, whose hubris led God to punish him with madness. However, in Guillaume's letter he explained that his sin caused guilt which led to madness. He did not perceive his madness as a direct punishment from God for his sinful behavior.

Although Guillaume confessed and received absolution from the church, he was never pursued by the king's justice, and therefore he believed he had

to prevent impulsive vengeance. Jacqueline Van Leeuwen 2005 discusses the translation of Albertanus' treatise into Dutch. For an interesting exploration of the development of the study of emotions, see Deploige 2005.

113 ANJJ 190 fo 33 no 64: 'par temptacion de lennemy ou autrement habita par une foiz avec une jument et par cinq ou six foiz avec une vache'.

114 The age of responsibility, and of consent (which is clearly relevant here), was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys.

115 ANJJ 190 fo 33 no 64: 'pechir'.

116 ANJJ 190 fo 33 no 64: 'sachant iceulx estre enormes et detestables'.

117 See Doob 1974. See also Fritz 1992, pp. 165–191, for a discussion of the sermon literature and theoretical literature that presents this argument. It is interesting that sermons did not make much of an impact in this case.

not sufficiently paid for his crime.<sup>118</sup> In his remission letter, he explained that

for the grand displeasure and anger that he had towards himself for the horror and infamy of this and also for the great sin that he felt he had committed in this case towards God our creator, [he] entered into such a melancholy and displeasure that he was alienated and troubled in his good sense and understanding such that he had two or three times despaired and wanted to kill and drown himself, and afterwards he, thus troubled and altered, went before the eyes of the justice of Osain and of his own movement, without being constrained nor accused but liberally and of his frank will told and confessed having committed the said acts in the manner in which it is here above declared and for this cause was taken and constituted prisoner.<sup>119</sup>

Guillaume was driven into a melancholy madness because of his feelings of horror and anger against himself about the sin he had committed in his youth. He was unable to assuage his self-directed anger through the mechanisms offered by the church, and so he turned himself in to the secular law, taking himself 'before the eyes of the justice of Osain' to confess publicly to the government's representatives. His decision to turn himself in to the officers of the law was described in the letter as part of his madness. The idea that a desire to be punished for committing a crime was evidence of a lack of reason appeared in at least two other letters,<sup>120</sup> suggesting that it was considered rational to try to avoid punishment. Guillaume's troubling and suicidal desire to 'kill and drown himself' was transferred into a desire for

118 See Mansfield 1995 for a discussion of guilt and confession, particularly pages 35–36, where she talks about cases where guilt prompted confession, and page 81 where she notes a sermon exemplum in which a woman commits suicide because of her inability to confess to having consented to her mother's murder. Note also Texier 2001, p. 490, where he links the narrative frame of remission letters to the system of religious confession in terms of temptation and repentance.

119 ANJJ 190 fo 33 no 64: 'pour le grant desplaisir et courroux quil en avoit en soy mesmes pour horreur et infame diceulx et aussi pour le grant pechir quil sentoit a ceste cause avoir commis envers dieu notre createur est entre en une telle merancolie et desplaisance quil sen est aliene et trouble en son bon sens et entendement et tellement quil a este par deux ou trois foiz en voye de desespoir et de fait sest voulu occire et noyer et apres lui estant ainsi trouble et altere sen est ale devant les yeus de la justice du lieu de osain et de son propre mouvement sans contraincte ne accusacion leut a liberalment et de sa franche volente dit et confesse avoir commis lesdis cas en la maniere quil est cy dessus declare et a ceste cause fut mis et constitue prisonnier'.

120 ANJJ 188 fo 10 no 15 (in 1458) and ANJJ 188 fo 81 no 160 (in 1459). The former is edited in Guérin 1909, vol. 10, pp. 92–94.

an equally suicidal but more public expurgation of his crime through the mechanisms of secular law. Indeed, it seems that Guillaume, or the notary who helped him compose his letter, had internalized the discourse of the execution of convicted criminals as public spectacle. Ultimately, however, since Guillaume himself sought this remission, he must have changed his mind about his desire for full punishment under the law.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps the reading of his confessional letter of remission by the local justice was a sufficiently public ritual to expiate his guilt, or perhaps Guillaume had recovered his 'sanity' while in prison.

Unfounded jealousy of spouses suspected of infidelity appeared quite often in the remission letters, as a catalyst for despair and suicide and sometimes as a cause for murder. Even when there were grounds for jealousy, these people acted on their emotions in ways that were considered excessive and unacceptable. By attempting to comprehend these cases in terms of madness, the family and relatives could reconcile these actions and reintegrate into the community those who survived these moments of rupture. Symonnet de la Dert, called Bridalet, fell into jealousy in 1394 because of 'false reports of women or other people' which had accused his wife of infidelity and his daughter (of marriageable age) of fornication.<sup>122</sup> As a result of his great jealousy he 'became thus as if completely furious and insensible and stopped doing his work and became idle and for hours was in such a state that he did not know what he said nor what he did'.<sup>123</sup> Symonnet de la Dert's entire household and community suffered, since he was incapable of working as a result of his jealousy, which (according to the letter composed on behalf of the wife and daughter) was entirely unfounded. He beat his wife and daughter, and then ran away to the woods for two days. After returning to his home, he still refused to work, forcing his wife and daughter to seek employment outside the house and leave him alone, when 'being in his said fury, by temptation of the enemy, he hanged himself'.<sup>124</sup>

In a similar case from 1426, Jehannette Maillart committed suicide because she was 'often weakened in her understanding, and as if furious, as much from drinking too much, in which she felt herself drowning, as

121 Since all remission letters are for crimes punishable by death, a desire to receive remission indicates that Guillaume Sunoneau was no longer feeling suicidal.

122 AN JJ 146 fo 83v no 162: 'faulx rappers de femmes ou autres personnes'. It is not entirely clear who the 'other people' described might be – men, one hazards.

123 AN JJ 146 fo 83v no 162: 'devint ainsi comme tout furieux et insensible et delaissoit affaire son labour et estoit oiseux et par heures estoit en cel estoit que il ne savoit quil disoit ne quil faisoit'.

124 AN JJ 146 fo 83v no 162: 'estant en sa dicte fuerosite par temptacion de lannemj se pendi'.

from suspicion of jealousy that she had against her said husband without cause'.<sup>125</sup> In this case, Jehannette Maillart's madness was attributable either to her drinking<sup>126</sup> or to her jealousy of her husband. Neither her husband, who was seeking a letter of remission for her, nor the royal notary, who helped compose the letter, considered it necessary to determine which was the ultimate source. The important point from the perspective of the letter composers was her lack of understanding, either due to her illness or to her jealousy, which made her lack culpability for any action she might take. In both these cases, the surviving family members insisted the jealousy was unwarranted, establishing their own innocence in the sordid suicides. Rather, the suicide victims became the active parties, causing their own deaths, both through their incapacity to understand the truth (that their spouses were faithful) and through the crimes that their jealousy and madness drove them to commit. In Symonnet's case, he would not have been given the opportunity to kill himself if his madness had not caused him to become idle and forced his wife and daughter to leave him alone in the house. Similarly, Jehannette's illness might have had as large a role in her ultimate death as her suspicion of her husband.

A third narrative of jealousy played out to a very different ending. It began with the same basic storyline. In 1425, Simon Rogate became jealous of his wife, who, he believed, was having an affair with Huguenin Baulion, the son of their neighbor, whom it had been rumored she might marry before her marriage to Simon. However, from that point the narrative departed from the familiar tale of mistaken jealousy. Rather, Simon Rogate actually caught his wife and Huguenin together in suspicious circumstances and confronted her. According to the letter, their confrontation turned into an argument, during which Simon's wife informed him that she 'would have preferred to marry [Huguenin] than [Simon]' and admitted she had had carnal relations with Huguenin.<sup>127</sup> This news 'placed [Simon] in even greater suspicion, anger and melancholy', emotions that ultimately led him, several days later, to beat his wife.<sup>128</sup> Though he explained in the

125 AN JJ 173 fo 188v no 392, edited mistakenly as JJ 175 no 392 in Longnon 1878, p. 208: 'souvent ebetée de son entendement, et comme furieuse, tant par trop boire dont elle se sentoit delegier, et par sospeçon de jalousie qu'elle avoit sans cause contre son dit mary'.

126 Karla Taylor, in a personal communication in February 2006, pointed out that this description seems to fit the illness of hydromania, an excessive need for water. The text is ambiguous, and may refer to drinking too much water or to becoming drunk, but either way her madness appeared connected to her drinking according to the composers of the letter.

127 AN JJ 173 fo 168 no 349: 'lamast mieulx avoir espouse que icellui suppliant'.

128 AN JJ 173 fo 168 no 349: 'mis en plusgrant souspeçon courrouz et melancolie'.

letter he had intended the beating merely as a corrective, his wife died from it, and he was forced to seek remission for murder. Jealousy could drive people to a violent madness that was directed outwards, as well as towards themselves.

Marguerite Bouchart was around forty years old in 1489 when her husband decided (against Marguerite's will) that they would move away from the village they had lived in for most of their married life. Marguerite explained that because 'it was such a strange thing for her to make a new household, she became as if completely out of her good sense and understanding, and being in this grief and displeasure', she tried to prevent people from moving her things out of her house.<sup>129</sup> In what at first seems to be a rather petty act of defiance, Marguerite took a container of onions from the cart of moveable goods, threw most of them in the water, and cut up some others to eat right away. Marguerite's husband responded by yelling at her, and then began to beat her. She, 'not knowing what she was doing', stabbed him with the knife she had been using to cut the onions, giving him a wound that proved fatal.<sup>130</sup>

In many respects, Marguerite's remission letter reads like those of other domestic disputes that do not mention madness as a possible reason for a wife to kill her husband. Her husband was beating her while she was holding a knife in her hand for legitimate purposes, and before her husband died, he had forgiven her for the act.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, the decision to explain her actions as rooted in a temporary lack of sense and understanding, such that she 'did not know what she was doing',<sup>132</sup> granted a particularity to her crime. Marguerite's actions were not merely those of a woman upset at leaving her home, but the actions of a woman whose distress at a situation she could not control had driven her out of her mind. The discourse of madness in this remission letter, in a sense, provided a space within which Marguerite could act upon her emotions, of sorrow and frustration, in a violent way. Her momentary experience of being 'out of her senses' was considerably more transitory than the madness of other people who appear in remission letters. However, the way the discourse of madness could be deployed even in such

129 ANJJ 220 fo 52v no 90: 'quil lui estoit chose fort estrange faire nouveau mesnage quelle en fut comme tout hors debon sens et entendement et elle estant en ceste douleur et desplaisir'.

130 ANJJ 220 fo 52v no 90: 'ne savoit quelle faisoit'.

131 See Davis 1987, pp. 77–110, where she discusses the themes of accidental violence provoked by a beating in stories of women killing their husbands. Although she is addressing a later period, the themes are already present in these letters. See also Gauvard 1991, vol. 2, p. 573. Gauvard argues that domestic violence accounts for only two percent of the letters of remission. Interestingly, the percentage is much higher within cases citing madness as a reason for the crime.

132 ANJJ 220 fo 52v no 90: 'quelle ne savoit quelle faisoit'.

a weak case suggests the strength of the conceptual connection between family strife, emotion, and madness.

Madness was often seen as caused by family situations that could not be controlled. Phote, probably short for Philippote, Brumel, the widow of a knight, had a young daughter named Marguerite for whom she had arranged an advantageous marriage in 1379. Unfortunately, Marguerite had been impregnated by Phot, most likely a diminutive of Philippot, le Roy, their carter. When Phote discovered that her daughter was pregnant, and by an employee, she 'was much marvelously grieved and astonished because she had believed that her said daughter was a good girl'.<sup>133</sup> According to the letter, the birth of the baby caused Phote to lose her reason, and

then the said Phote as if entirely despairing and angered by this event, still remembering how her said daughter was promised by marriage to a knight of the country, said to the said Phot, tempted by the enemy and as if out of her senses, that he should take the said infant and that he should carry it with her and that he should never talk about it. So the said Phot took the infant and carried it with the said Phote up to the place called the Lodges near the said town of Mareygnny and they found a well nearby into the which well the said Phote, thus angered and insane [*forsenée*] as has been said, said to the said Phot that he should throw the said infant and forthwith the said Phot threw this infant into the said well.<sup>134</sup>

The narrative presented a mother who was thwarted in her plans to support her daughter through an advantageous marriage, and who was driven mad by despair and anger. Her accomplice, Phot, moved to another town, where he was found and brought to justice, at which point Phote feared she had been implicated in the crime. Indeed, Phote herself seemed to believe that her decision to kill the baby was wrong, since she and her daughter immediately went into self-imposed exile before seeking a letter of remission to exonerate

133 ANJJ 114 fo 116v no 236: 'fu moult merveilliee dolente et esbahie car elle cuidoit sa dite fille estre bonne pucelle'.

134 ANJJ 114 fo 116v no 236: 'lors la dite phote comme toute desesperee et courrociee dudit cas encore soy remembrant comme sa dite fille estoit promise par mariage a un escuier du pais dist audit phot temptee de lennemj et comme hors de son sens quil preist le dit enfant et quil le portast avec elle et que jamais il ne le rapporteroient adont le dit phot print le dit enfant et le porta avec la dite phote jusques au lieu dit les loges pres de la dite ville de mareygnny et trouverent un puis pres dillec dedans le quel puis la dite phote ainsi corrociee et forsenee comme dit est dist au dit phot que il y gectast le dit enfant et incontinent gecta le dit phot ycellui enfant dedans le dit puis'.

her. She explained that the decision to commit infanticide arose from her despair, causing her to become mad and take actions that, in a less stressful situation, she would never have considered.

Domestic problems had to be relatively excessive to believably provoke madness in response. For example, in a letter from 1490, Laurens de Pre explained that he had lived in a household with his wife's parents, which made for an uncomfortable domestic situation. After Laurens's wife gave birth to their first child, his mother-in-law, Marguerite Collard, conceived 'such a great hatred' for him that she decided to keep her daughter away from him, and would not allow them to sleep together.<sup>135</sup> This caused 'great sorrow' for Laurens.<sup>136</sup> When Laurens tried one night to sneak into the bed his wife was sharing with her mother, Marguerite Collard woke up and hit him on the head with a big stick. Temporarily out of his senses, he took out the knife he used to cut bread, and killed her. In this case, both an untenable situation that continued over time and a blow to the head at the moment of the crime were required to make Laurens de Pre so stunned 'that he did not know what he was doing or where he was'.<sup>137</sup>

Family conflicts could also become the source of a form of temporary insanity with much milder results. For example, Gernaye Pillot moved to a new town, where in 1459 he became engaged without the counsel of his father or any of his family. When he came to ask his father to help him pay for his wedding, his father refused. 'Troubled in his understanding' because of his father's refusal, Gernaye stole some cows to use to pay for his wedding.<sup>138</sup> Because Gernaye was not the head of a household, he was subject to his father's will. Having broken that will by becoming engaged without seeking advice, Gernaye was punished, which caused him to resort to theft, further alienating himself from his family. The letter of remission, which he sought for himself, developed the theme of a prodigal son who was spurned, rather than *fêted*, on his return.

Conflicts were often instigated when the mad person, like Symonnett de la Dert described above, could no longer fulfill expected household roles. For example, during her pregnancy in 1423, Jehannette Voidié believed that her husband's income would not allow them to support a third child, despite his reassurance.<sup>139</sup> Her family later interpreted Jehannette's feelings

135 ANJJ 221 fo 124v no 215: 'si grant hayne'.

136 ANJJ 221 fo 124v no 215: 'grant dueil'.

137 ANJJ 221 fo 124v no 215: 'quil ne savoit quil faisoit ne ou il estoit'.

138 ANJJ 188 fo 82v no 163.

139 ANJJ 172 fo 239 no 430, edited in Longnon 1878, pp. 130–133.

of insecurity as a direct cause of her madness. When she gave birth to a son, she lost her milk because of an argument she had with the lying-in maid over some linens,<sup>140</sup> and the baby had to be sent to a wet-nurse.<sup>141</sup> This sent Jehannette even further into a melancholy, during which she did not interact with her husband or her other children, telling them 'they had in her a bad mother'.<sup>142</sup> Jehan Lambert, her husband, repeatedly assured her that he made enough money to support their family, and then threatened to beat her if she continued to repine. She responded that she wished he would beat her to death, and proceeded to attempt to commit suicide. When her child returned from the wet-nurse, he was very sickly, and Jehannette Voidié decided to take him on a pilgrimage. On the way, she stopped for her sister, and while she was waiting, Jehannette, upset about her child's weakness, 'entered into her said melancholies and furor or lack of sense, as it is to be believed and presumed, and by temptation of the enemy threw this her infant into the well'.<sup>143</sup> Her sister, hearing the splash, ran back. When she told Jehannette Voidié that she was a bad mother and had drowned her baby, Jehannette denied it, insisting the baby was fine, and joining enthusiastically in the attempts to fish him out. Eventually, however, she left the scene and ran away. The letter thus describes a drastic change in behavior during this recent pregnancy that made Jehannette unrecognizable. Although the letter does not give much detail about her life before, it is clear that Jehannette's husband found her behavior baffling.

Unlike Jehannette, who was portrayed as mistaken about her husband's income, Gouyn Cluchat faced a real family crisis in 1459.<sup>144</sup> As noted above, his failure to protect his family was the source of his despair. When the plague arrived in their village, he moved himself, his wife, and their four

140 The period immediately following childbirth was a dangerous time, and conflicts between lying-in maids and mothers, resulting in a loss of milk or other problems with the baby, were not unusual. Indeed, a century later such conflicts were likely to result in witchcraft accusations against the lying-in maid. For more on these relationships, see Roper 1994.

141 It is clear from the text that Jehannette Voidié was expected to nurse her own child, but that the family had the resources to hire a wetnurse if necessary. Wetnursing was a relatively common practice at this time, despite a growing literature encouraging women to nurse their own babies for fear the wetnurse's milk would adversely affect the child. For an exploration of these themes as they relate to Italy, see Klapisch-Zuber 1985.

142 ANJJ 172 fo 239 no 430, edited in Longnon 1878, pp. 130-133: 'qu'ilz avoient en elle une mauvaise mere'.

143 ANJJ 172 fo 239 no 430, edited in Longnon 1878, pp. 130-133: 'entra en sesdictes melancolies et fureur ou non sens, comme il est à croire et presumer, et par temptacion de l'ennemi gecta icellui son enfant ou puy's'.

144 ANJJ 188 fo 81 no 160.

young children to a neighboring town to escape from the danger. A few months later, Cluchat's wife fell ill with a fever, and he realized they were running out of provisions. Although they had left behind some flour and some wine in their village, he did not dare to return for them because of the plague. Instead, he went into a nearby city to borrow some flour or some money to support his sick wife and his children, but no one was willing to help him. After escaping from the plague, he and his family seemed likely to starve instead. This crisis made Cluchat so upset that he went to a fountain in the town, thinking in his despair to drown himself, but a woman who happened to be passing stopped to ask him what he was doing, and he was so embarrassed he left. Arriving at his house, 'as if he was out of his senses', Cluchat took an axe used for chopping wood, and hit his wife on the head with it and killed her.<sup>145</sup> Here the composers of the remission letter described a more evident rupture of selfhood. Gouyn Cluchat was described through most of the letter as a man who cared for his family's safety and wellbeing. He took them to a new town to escape from the plague, and went out to beg to prevent them from starving. It was only after his failure to provide for them that his identity cracked. Had his suicide attempt succeeded, he would have left his children and his sick wife to fend for themselves, which clearly does not fit his behavior pattern up to this point. His ultimate crime of killing his wife with an axe, therefore, was connected to this pattern of unacceptable behavior in the narrative.

In these cases, feelings of insecurity and a perceived inability (on the part of themselves or others) to care for their families led these people to madness and sometimes suicide attempts. Although neither Jehannette's nor Gouyn's story ended with self-murder, it is clear that their families saw a connection between their ultimate crime and their previous desire to turn their anger and fears against themselves. Family conflicts often arose due to the mad person's inability to fulfill certain expected roles. Not all the remission letters about madness set up such clear patterns of usual and unusual behaviors in the lives of the individuals they described, but the letters that did actually attempted to enter into the mad person's perception of reality to understand how the particular mad person understood the world and why he or she might therefore have committed a criminal act. Even in cases where the fears of the mad are unfounded, they are based on recognizable problems.

Remission letters give us a window into some of the methods the letter composers used to understand the crimes committed by the mad. One of the

145 AN JJ 188 fo 81 no 160: 'come hors du sens et debilite de son entendement'.

ways in which medieval families coped with these crimes was by seeking to explain them. While the actions of the mad could appear inappropriate and inexplicable to an external observer, within the context of the remission letter the composers sometimes tried to justify the crime based on the mad person's flawed perception of reality. In contrast to the philosophy of the first-century Greek physician Aretaeus, who believed that mad people saw as other people did but interpreted what they saw incorrectly,<sup>146</sup> remission letters seem to suggest that mad people actually experienced a different reality. From the rhetorical frame of the relatives and immediate family, the composers of these letters ultimately discussed the event from the perspective of the primary actor involved, resulting in complicated attempts to comprehend the motivations of a person perceived as mad. Thus, some letters superimposed explicable motives onto the narrative of a mad crime in an effort to force the crime to be comprehensible. Through these attempts an image of the internal viewpoint of a mad mind emerged.

Unlike the more common murders in remission letters, which took place in taverns or on the street, generally after drinking and various forms of gambling, the crimes of the mad were much more likely to take place inside the home, and often the victim was a family member. Therefore, the violence of the mad was disquieting and difficult to explain. While some letters chose to describe this violence as motiveless and unexpected, many remission letters cited common troubles, such as poverty, jealousy, and guilt, either as direct causes of madness or as the results of a mad person's flawed perception of reality. For example, in the case of Jehannette Voidié, who dropped her legitimate baby son in a well in 1423, the composers of her letter explained that during her pregnancy she had been concerned about whether the family could support another child, and that she had often spoken of herself as a bad mother.<sup>147</sup> These concerns, according to the composers of the letter, were completely groundless, since her husband could support another child, but Jehannette's understanding of reality was skewed.<sup>148</sup> Instead of suggesting that she threw her child in the well for no discernable reason, the composers of the letter tried to understand the crime. The problem was in Jehannette's flawed perception of reality, not only in terms of her inability to recognize that her family could support another child, but

<sup>146</sup> Rosen 1968, p. 97.

<sup>147</sup> Madness was often linked to infanticide cases where the child was legitimate, since there was no culturally recognized reason to get rid of or hide a legitimate birth.

<sup>148</sup> ANJJ 172 fo 239 no 430, edited in Longnon 1878, pp. 130–133.

also in her belief that killing the child was a reasonable response to the crisis she supposedly perceived.

There was no single way to reconstruct the past in remission letters, and no particular narrative that acted as proof of a history of madness. Each story reconstructed the past of the individual in a way that highlighted those moments that seemed mad to the composers. In the case of Jehan de Moustier discussed in Chapter Two, his mad behavior was centered on food. The narrative of his letter confirmed his madness, arguing that it was clear from his actions and also providing a clear history of behavior that led up to the murder of his father.<sup>149</sup> While on the one hand this exculpated Jehan de Moustier completely, on the other it confirmed his madness to such an extent that he was only released into the care of his family on condition that he be kept chained. Jehannette Voidié's actions were described much more cautiously, whether by the choice of her relatives and close family or because of the recommendation of the royal notary. While her suicide attempts were certainly attributed to her melancholy, the language used in the remission letter suggests some doubt about what caused her to throw her child into the well. It was 'presumed' that she entered into her melancholy and frenzy, but it was not certain.<sup>150</sup> In the end, Jehannette Voidié was given remission on condition that she be kept in prison for fifteen days on bread and water, and that she pay for fifty masses to be sung for her dead child, a punishment that seems more appropriate for someone who was in fact guilty of committing a crime, rather than someone who was not considered responsible for her own actions.

Jehan Lambert could support another child, but there were people whose fears were not so imaginary. Gouyn Cluchat, stuck between plague and starvation, was unable to support his family.<sup>151</sup> The composers of his remission letter emphasized the fact that Gouyn Cluchat was unable to find help in the region, and that the murder of his wife was caused by extreme provocation. Unlike Jehannette, Cluchat was fully aware of what he had done, and went out of the house to find some neighbors so he could tell them he had just killed his wife. Indeed, he went even further, traveling to the nearby city of Combronde and demanding they put him to death for his crime. To the family members composing his letter of remission and even to the officers in Combronde, his desire to be hanged was further proof of his madness. However, the composers of his letter explained, since

149 AN JJ 118 fo 18v no 18.

150 AN JJ 172 fo 239 no 430, edited in Longnon 1878, pp. 130–133: 'comme il est à croire et presumer'.

151 AN JJ 188 fo 81 no 160.

the officers did not dare to proceed against him he was likely to remain in prison indefinitely, unless the king stepped in to pardon him. This letter, like many others, leaves us with no clear picture of the ultimate fate of the madman. He was released from prison on the authority of the king, and with no conditions such as keeping him chained up or under guard. His family seemed to believe his release would prevent his children from becoming beggars, but they provided no hint about what would be done to cope with his extreme melancholy and his desire to be punished for his crime.

In these cases, there are distinct understandings of madness at work. With Jehannette, her lack of knowledge of having committed the crime demonstrated to her family that she was not in her right mind when she did it.<sup>152</sup> In this case, her inability to recognize the results of her actions while mad meant she did not act with intent, although the fact that she was required to pay for masses for her baby's soul suggests there was some question about whether she nevertheless deserved to be punished. Jehan de Moustier was also unable to recognize his crime. When he was told he had killed his father, he responded that 'he was only my father according to whispers', which suggests he was denying his own identity.<sup>153</sup> In contrast, Gouyn Cluchat's admission of guilt and, further, his active desire to be punished for his crime, was cited by his family and by the officers at Combronde as a clear indication of his insanity.<sup>154</sup> In his insistence on guilt and punishment, the composers of his remission letter dealt with the concept of irrational behavior. Unlike the crime itself, which could be comprehended due to his flawed perception of reality, the decision to seek punishment for that crime was seen as irrational.

Moments of emotional upheaval in these letters often centered on conflicts between family members that caused one of them to become mad. Discord generally arose around questions of power dynamics within the family. The narratives built on points of tension between the familial hierarchy on the one hand and the desires of the family members to create space for their own autonomy on the other. While the disruptive response of the family member who struck out against the hierarchy was clearly considered unacceptable by the rest of the family, the label of madness opened up the possibility

<sup>152</sup> Guillaume Audoyt was also unable to remember that he had beaten his wife in AN JJ 160 fo 70v no 91, edited in Guérin 1909, pp. 80–82.

<sup>153</sup> AN JJ 118 fo 18v no 18: 'il dist que il nestoit son pere que dans oreille'.

<sup>154</sup> This is also the case for Guillaume Sunoneau, who committed bestiality and chose to turn himself in to the local officials because of his guilt. See AN JJ 190 fo 33 no 64 (in 1460).

of resistance to the hierarchy while nevertheless forcing that resistance, ultimately, to be controlled and defused. These narratives described moments of rupture, where the accepted familial hierarchy was overturned, but only momentarily. By understanding these ruptures as moments of madness, the texts allowed for reconciliation and the reintegration of the recovered mad person into his or her expected position.

The brief life narratives encapsulated within remission letters conceal much about their protagonists. These crimes are told from only one perspective, that of the criminal, or in some cases of those taking the criminal's part. It is not possible to trace these crimes to their source and discover more about the community where they were committed, or find dissenting voices that could clarify the details of the case or shed light on alternative narratives about the crimes or about those who committed them. The mad people described in these letters disappeared from the public record after remission was granted. What did the family and community actually do once the mad person was released from prison? What was the long-term effect of the admission of guilt and madness on the individuals and on their communities? Answers to these questions, and many others, remain tantalizingly out of reach.

Nevertheless, these letters reveal important details about how madness was understood and what kinds of actions were taken on behalf of those considered mad. Madness, conceived as an inability to understand the world and particularly the rules, explicit and implicit, that governed human interactions, revealed the instability of communities on all levels. However, despite the medieval 'persecuting society',<sup>155</sup> mad people were not exiled from their communities as a result of the threat they posed. Rather, even after committing crimes, they could be reintegrated into their families and communities. The very ties they had ruptured were reconstructed through the narratives of these remission letters, as the letter composers sought to place mad people at the center of communal responsibility and concern.

The crimes of the mad, as narrated in remission letters, departed so radically from accepted norms of behavior that they made the reintegration of the guilty especially difficult. Nevertheless, remission letters sought in their narratives to reconstruct the very bonds ruptured through these crimes, not only in their hopes for the future, but also in their depictions of the past. In this way they constructed an 'imagined community' that was significantly more positive than the community in which they actually lived.

155 Moore 1987.

