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052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

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## Introduction

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### Mania as rhetoric

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Christopher, help me love this loose thing.  
I think of you now, kneeling in London muck,  
Praying for grace to descend.

Theodore Roethke, "The Dark Angel," from  
*Straw for the Fire: from the Notebooks of . . .*

This book concerns three moments of what I shall call a "manic" rhetoric. It explores the evolution of that rhetoric as represented in texts by Ranter Abiezer Coppe during the Interregnum, Jonathan Swift in the late seventeenth century, and Christopher Smart in the mid-eighteenth century. Above all, it concerns the manic as a specifically rhetorical phenomenon. It attempts a break from the inherited language for discussing a certain kind of centrally eccentric text – not so much a clean break as a sort of knight's move, a strategic reorientation of the older terms. I hope to rethink the "manic," a term for individual pathology, from a transindividual and historical perspective. A certain kind of textual mania, as I shall demonstrate, can only be fully understood in connection with the prophetic and oracular religious rhetoric surrounding the English Revolution.

I contend, indeed, that the English Civil War must be seen as the well-spring of the manic rhetorical style in British letters. This is not to say that one cannot find prior texts with manic tendencies,<sup>1</sup> but, rather, that later cultural memory has designated manic enthusiasm as the very sign of that ill-digested revolutionary trauma. The enthusiastic rhetoric that continues to concern and influence us most is indelibly marked, and hence,

<sup>1</sup> The sixteenth-century Martin Marprelate polemics, for example, use many forms of rhetorical inversion common to the manic mode. The seventeenth-century Leveller Richard Overton, moreover, deliberately evokes the memory of that earlier controversy. See Nigel Smith, "Richard Overton's Marpriest tracts: towards a history of Leveller style," *Prose Studies* 9:2 (1986), pp. 39–66. Christopher Hill suggests that some very general geographical and doctrinal continuities, though difficult to document, can be tentatively traced from the seventeenth-century radical separatists all the way back to the Lollards. See Christopher Hill, "From Lollards to Levellers," in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, 2 vols. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), II: *Religion and Politics in 17th-Century England*, pp. 89–116.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

retroactively given its primary cultural meaning, by that seventeenth-century revolution.<sup>2</sup> “Enthusiasm,” in this sense, is the profoundly ambivalent signifier of two revolutions: the bourgeois revolution that did occur and the far more democratic and egalitarian revolution whose possibility was tantalizingly glimpsed and then suppressed.

The texts that I call “manic” all share the key element of enthusiasm: a claim, that is, to supernatural authority. This is the infamous “grandiosity” or “omnipotence” described in all the psychoanalytic literature on mania. My use of the term “manic,” however, entails a revision of such notions by also invoking, through the key theme of divine election, a historical arena of ideological and political struggle. Given that Biblical authority was the outermost horizon of seventeenth-century British thought – a shared master code, as it were, even among the warring factions<sup>3</sup> – it is deeply unhistorical to read pathology back into such enthusiastic rhetorical strategies.

The manic rhetorical style is constituted, above all, by its rebellious stance toward traditional hierarchies of socio-economic privilege and their related hierarchies of discourse. It is thus a crucial and telling instance of “class struggle without class,” in E. P. Thompson’s phrase.<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact, that is to say, that a politically mature, self-aware, and horizontally constituted working class did not exist as such prior to the industrial revolution<sup>5</sup>; that socio-economic stratification was mainly described and understood throughout the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth century not in terms of “class,” but, rather, in the quasi-feudal terms of “rank” and “order”<sup>6</sup> – despite these well-known facts, the notion of class struggle is an indispensable heuristic device for rendering the manic

<sup>2</sup> Because some historians prefer labels that do not maximize the implied level of change – “The Great Rebellion,” for instance – the term itself is in dispute. See Barry Coward, “Was there an English Revolution in the middle of the seventeenth century?” in *Politics and People in Revolutionary England: Essays in Honor of Ivan Roots*, ed. Colin Jones et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 9–40. The interpretative struggle over the meaning of this event has gone on, as R. C. Richardson demonstrates, for some three centuries. See R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution Revisited*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Religion and ideology: a political reading of *Paradise Lost*,” in *Literature, Politics, Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference 1976–1984*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme et al. (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 37–39.

<sup>4</sup> See E. P. Thompson, “Patrician society, plebeian culture,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (Summer 1974), pp. 382–405, and “Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?,” *Social History* 3 (May, 1978), pp. 133–165. For a helpful discussion of the place and significance of eighteenth-century studies in the trajectory of Thompson’s intellectual career, see Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 189–203.

<sup>5</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> See Steven Wallech, “Class versus rank: the transformation of eighteenth-century social terms and theories of production,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47:3 (1986), pp. 409–431; and Penelope J. Cornfield, “Class by name and number in eighteenth-century Britain,” in *Language, History, and Class* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 101–130. Wallech emphasizes the lingering power of the residual feudal model, which gradually begins to be displaced only when political economists such as Ricardo and Smith bring the process of production (and the roles therein of “class”) to the center of their analyses. Cornfield demonstrates, however, that an emergent language of class

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

style even minimally intelligible. As Christopher Hill's work on the seventeenth century and Thompson's work on the eighteenth century demonstrate, it is only by means of a class-struggle analysis of pre-industrial English society that one can explain much about either the various modes of patrician hegemony, or (granting the well-defined limits of that order of struggle) the manifold modes of plebeian resistance to such domination and exploitation. The precise forms taken by enthusiastic resistance, as we shall see, are determined by particular historical moments and their circumstances.

Thompson's emphasis on the constitutive process of socio-economic struggle in class formation preserves a meaningful role, long before an English proletariat exists as such, for the historical agency of class. At the same time, it deftly avoids two fallacies: it avoids, on the one hand, the anachronism of treating "class" as a static category, and thus reading back into history some supposedly timeless horizontal opposition between agonistic classes. On the other hand, it refuses an anthropomorphic reduction of classes to character-like collective "subjects." Manic rhetoric, with its roots in the English Revolution, is important evidence for the validity of this approach.

A seventeenth-century Puritan text, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is, according to Thompson, "one of the two foundation texts of the working-class movement": itself an important agency of class consciousness, and hence something of a political success in terms of nineteenth-century counter-hegemonic class formation. However, *Pilgrim's Progress*, though in dialogue with more radical views, is neither revolutionary nor very enthusiastic. By way of contrast, then, the texts of the more radical enthusiastic style can be seen as illustrating a premature emergence of revolutionary consciousness. They do of course speak to the revolutionary conflict as it was actually resolved. Yet they speak also in a different, more wishful register, to, and for, far more egalitarian social orders that could have emerged – but did not – from the revolution. To quote Christopher Hill:

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was already being more widely disseminated by the middle of the eighteenth century. Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* (1743), as Cornfield observes, divides the world starkly into "those that use their own hands, and those that use the hands of others." Hogarth's contrast between "Beer Street" and "Gin Lane" points to a similarly Manichaean polarization. For an analysis of the latter, which also accounts for the commercialized and consumption-oriented dimensions of plebeian culture, see Hans Medick, "Plebeian culture in the transition to capitalism," in *Culture, Ideology, and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, eds. Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 84–112. A broader historical and geographic perspective on these issues can be found in Peter Burke, "The language of orders in early modern Europe," in *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification*, ed. M. L. Bush (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 1–12. I hope in the course of this book to contribute further to the development of a flexible analytic use of "class" as one among several interactive social identities. See *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, eds. Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, The Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

There were, we may oversimplify, two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the ideology of the men of property – the protestant ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic.<sup>7</sup>

Both the manic mode and many aspects of its reception stem from this moment of containment or failed emergence. “Milton’s nation of prophets,” as Hill says, “became a nation of shopkeepers,”<sup>8</sup> and the most subversive separatists were seemingly forced into a lengthy retrenchment, introspection, and quiescence. Thompson describes the trajectory of this big chill as follows: “*Puritanism – Dissent – Nonconformity*: the decline collapses into a surrender. *Dissent* still carries the sound of resistance to Apollyon and the Whore of Babylon, *Nonconformity* is self-effacing and apologetic: it asks to be left alone.”<sup>9</sup> Despite this obvious political failure, however, the impact of the manic mode persists, as a subterranean factor in the cultural life of Britain, much longer and more impressively than its fringe-group origins or brief heyday in the Interregnum might suggest. In terms of literary history, there is something to be said for N. H. Keeble’s argument that “it was not Civil War, nor regicide, nor Cromwell which released the Puritan imagination, but nonconformity.”<sup>10</sup> I would add to this, however, that the millennial promise of the revolutionary moment – adapted to, reconfigured for, and transformed by changing circumstances – is itself a crucial part of what gets handed down. As such, enthusiasm is a vivid and enduring presence in Britain’s literary landscape.

It is crucial, in studying the “manic,” to keep its social dimension steadily in view. For it can hardly be sufficiently stressed that the translation of religious enthusiasm into a matter of *private* pathology has a generally reactionary pedigree in the history of ideas. Henry More’s *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656), indeed, marks a turning point in this regard. After its publication, according to historian Michael MacDonald, Anglican pamphleteers began to rework Robert Burton’s famous argument about religious pathology in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* into a

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Making*, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 24.

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

“ruling-class shibboleth.”<sup>11</sup> Burton’s argument was, of course, that a religious faction quite recognizable as Puritans – a giddy company of “precisians” – were both the victims and the carriers of mental disease. In Burton’s words: “Wee may say of these peculiar sects, their Religion takes away not spirits only, but wit and judgement, and deprives them of all understanding: for some of them are so farre gone with their private Enthusiases, and revelations, that they are quite madde, out of their wits.”<sup>12</sup> It must be added, however, that this elite equation of enthusiasm with madness soon infiltrated circles well beyond the drawing rooms of the indisputably privileged. The pathologizing of enthusiasm thus became part of a broader elite hegemony. It is obvious enough that the pathologizing of manic rhetoric served to denigrate it and eventually to justify “shutting up,” in all possible senses, its users. The label of madness, retroactively buttressed by medical authority, then served to naturalize and universalize this persecution, concealing its basis in historical conflict. Roy Porter observes that the sequestration of lunatics, as a matter of civil policy initiated more by magistrates and philanthropists than doctors, in some sense preceded the psychiatric rationalization of the practice: “Psychiatry could flourish once, but not before, large numbers of inmates had been crowded into asylums.”<sup>13</sup> Precisely because of its privatizing character, moreover, the label of madness has excluded rival forms of explanation for the manic. This exclusion of more collective and historical ways of seeing the manic has long functioned to distort our reception of manic texts.<sup>14</sup>

The cultural fate of the manic, in this sense, is linked to the broader history of “madness” itself. I refer now not to the history of a disease, a supposedly timeless psychiatric entity, but to the history of a signifier, a meaning. For “madness” was not always the special province of an authoritative professional elite. Prior to its medicalization, the “madness” of Stuart England belonged simultaneously to a great variety of traditions, from the clinical to the moral to the astrological to the demonological. Such traditions of magic and occult knowledge, though denounced by Calvinist theologians of the period, were not distinct as such from science nor denounced by scientific practitioners.<sup>15</sup> Thus

<sup>11</sup> See Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England*, Cambridge History of Medicine Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 225. For a review of scholarship pertaining to the historical reaction against enthusiasm, see Michael Heyd, “The reaction to enthusiasm in the seventeenth century: towards an integrative approach,” *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981), pp. 258–280.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 5 vols., eds. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), III, p. 387.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: The World through the Eyes of the Insane* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> The concept of “mania” thus performs most of the legitimating and delegitimizing strategies that have been ascribed to ideology. See Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 5–6.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Hill, “Science and magic in seventeenth-century England,” in *Culture, Ideology and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 176–193.

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the prestigious seventeenth-century physician Richard Napier – who between 1597 and 1634 treated over 2000 patients for mental illness with an eclectic combination of magic, science, and religion – was probably not atypical for his time. As MacDonald's *Mystical Bedlam* shows, Napier assumed the need to negotiate with a cosmos teeming with supernatural beings. His eclectic treatments included charms, amulets, exorcisms, astrological diagnosis, phlebotomies, and various emetics. The “madness” treated thus by Napier seems quite discontinuous with that medicalized “madness” – functionally opposed to “reason” – whose subsequent career in the *âge classique* Michel Foucault attempts to trace in his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*.<sup>16</sup> We can have no excuse, moreover, in the wake of Foucault's work, for failing to reckon the extent to which a label of individual madness may have participated in a repressive history of segregating, confining, and silencing the “mad,” along with vagrants, beggars, debtors, and other stigmatized social nuisances.

To be sure, Foucault's well-known thesis that the European “Great Confinement” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a novel form of oppression has required considerable refinement and qualification, not to mention outright revision. Empirical research has nibbled away at both ends of Foucault's historical periodization. The practice of confining the mad, for example, can be traced back as far as fifteenth-century Spain, from where it spread across Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: an origin neither bourgeois nor absolutist.<sup>17</sup> To recognize this origin for the incarceration of “madness” does not preclude our understanding its later efflorescence in the specific contexts of bourgeois or absolutist social control; it does, however, undercut Foucault's overly idyllic presentation of the Renaissance as the one era in which madness, benignly neglected, wandered free and easy.

Regional variations and time-lags, moreover, appear in comparative studies of psychiatric confinement in England, France, and Germany. In England, for example, private charity, in the soft name of “benevolence,” rather than the policy of an absolutist state, sponsored much of the segregated housing for the incurably insane.<sup>18</sup> According to Roy Porter, moreover, sequestration in the eighteenth century was very unevenly developed – by no means the full-fledged bureaucratic system that arrived in the nineteenth century – and hence relatively eclectic and *ad hoc* in its improvisations. It was

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). Trans. into English by Richard Howard as *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> See H. C. Erik Midelfort, “Madness and civilization: a reappraisal of Michel Foucault,” in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H.exter*, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Andrews, “The lot of the ‘incurably’ insane in enlightenment England,” *Eighteenth Century Life*, vol. 12, n.s., 1 (1988), p. 4.

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

also relatively modest in scale: “the age of the ‘great confinement’ in England was,” as he writes, “not the Georgian era but its successor.”<sup>19</sup> The making of British psychiatry, in this view, was less the achievement of a centralized disciplinary power than the cumulative effort of various “mental entrepreneurs” or “captains of confinement”: a self-empowering professional elite who astutely capitalized on the demand for their services.<sup>20</sup> The Georgian era, then, is better seen as a period when the formal administrative segregation of the “mad,” operating alongside the many informal means of coping with them, was gradually emerging. Granting this refinement, however, Porter otherwise recapitulates much of Foucault’s argument: “All over Europe the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a proliferation of schools, prisons, houses of industry, houses of correction, workhouses and, not least, madhouses to deal with the menace of unreason.”<sup>21</sup> Porter attempts, with limited success, two further qualifications of Foucault. Though he concedes that some of the unreformed madhouses of the eighteenth century were indeed the benighted gothic dungeons described in reformist propaganda, he makes the rather modest point that others were somewhat more humane. He also argues against what appears to be a straw man: the hypothesis that the formal institutional confinement of the “mad” is best understood as an exercise of “naked class power.”<sup>22</sup> Because people of all ranks were confined in madhouses, he contends that psychiatry, in his words, “was not just – probably not even primarily – a discipline for controlling the rabble.”<sup>23</sup> Porter does concede, however, that the majority of the confined were paupers; and, moreover, that such laws as the English Vagrancy Act of 1714 did indeed link the confinement of so-called madness to broader concepts of domestic order.<sup>24</sup> The Vagrancy Act empowered Justices of the Peace to confine, as generic disturbers of the peace, lunatics, rogues, vagabonds, and beggars. He acknowledges, moreover, that “public opinion from the age of the Enlightenment onwards readily identified the attitudes and behaviour of marginal social elements – criminals, vagrants, the religious ‘lunatic fringe’ – with false consciousness and madness.”<sup>25</sup>

Such concessions seem so far-reaching as essentially to reconfirm the Foucauldian view that eighteenth-century psychiatric confinement was indeed – if not a “naked” exercise of class power – a powerful technique of

<sup>19</sup> Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Porter, *Manacles*, pp. 166–167. More details about the “mad business” of the time can be found in Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter’s *George III and the Mad Business* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> Porter, *Social*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Porter, *Manacles*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Porter, *Social*, p. 16.

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

bourgeois social control: a “chose de ‘police’” or “police matter,” as Foucault puts it.<sup>26</sup> Further empirical research, moreover, has confirmed that across Europe involuntary confinement was aimed, above all, at the poor. As H. C. Erik Midelfort observes, “It was only the poor-mad, the poor-deviant, the poor-criminal, and the just plain poor who were sent to the general hospitals in Germany and France.”<sup>27</sup> Such practices, as Midelfort points out, were often justified by an appeal to “traditional” monastic and ecclesiastical values.<sup>28</sup> Such apparent continuities with the past, however, in no way preclude the view that psychiatric incarceration was being adapted and expanded by a new order.

Early psychiatry was mediated by the category of the individual and articulated in the language of neutral expertise. It was exactly these depoliticizing features, indeed, that made it an effective instrument for civic administrators, religious magistrates, and their like – a class whose voice is especially audible in the following passage from Dr. J. Aiken’s *Thoughts on Hospitals* (1771):

By placing a number of them [lunatics] in a common receptacle, they may be taken care of by a much smaller number of attendants; at the same time, they are removed from the public eye to which they are multiplied objects of alarm, and the mischiefs they are liable to do to themselves and others, are with much greater certainty prevented. [Public institutions] instead of being a burthen . . . would be a saving to the community, not only from the relief of private families, but that of parishes.<sup>29</sup>

The confinement and psychiatric excommunication of the “mad” remains a significant episode in the history of English class struggle. And it is precisely the dawning of the “Great Confinement” that best serves here to distinguish Smart’s moment on the manic continuum from Abiezer Coppe’s. Although Coppe, like Smart, was incarcerated, his confinement was understood as punishment for blasphemy and sedition rather than as the segregation of irrationality. Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*, which parodies enthusiasm precisely in order to reinforce its reputation for mental pathology, marks a significant transitional moment in this larger process.

In this prolegomenon, I hope to establish a framework that permits the linking of Smart back to such seventeenth-century enthusiasts as Coppe. They are linked, in my view, by a common rhetorical practice with certain salient modes of addressing social divisions between those constituted as central and those pushed to the peripheries. As I intend the term, “rhetoric”

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *Histoire*, p. 75; *Madness*, p. 46. Here the term “police” anticipates everything Foucault would later mean by “discipline.”

<sup>27</sup> Midelfort, “Reappraisal,” p. 255.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>29</sup> J. Aiken, *Thoughts on Hospitals* (London, 1771), pp. 65 ff. Cited in Klaus Doerner, *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie: A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Jean Steinberg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 70.



Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

encompasses everything implicated in notions of the verbal, the textual, the persuasive, the performative. Highly deviant behavior, such as Ranter Abiezer Coppe's prophetic "pranks" – the term itself became a crucial manic *topos* – also has its rhetorical genres: it is the head-shaving, dung-eating Biblical prophet Ezekiel to whom Coppe refers as the precedent for his own strange gestures and postures.

A *rhetoric of mania* is and has been accessible to individual authors such as Smart – even by choice – within a specific historical matrix of radical Protestant religious discourse. As with any mode, the manic mode can be appropriated for particular purposes by particular authors. As with any mode, the history of such appropriations itself operates as a dimension of its meaning. And, as with any historically cumulative practice, the mode constitutes itself both by continuities and transformations: the manic mode exists not as a timeless essence, but an evolving pattern of family resemblances. It is obvious, to be sure, that the subterranean nature of manic rhetoric makes the tracing of direct continuities – direct lines of descent from one text to another – virtually impossible: for much of its transmission, after all, may have been oral.<sup>30</sup> Even so, the purely textual impact of the manic style testifies both to its cultural significance and to the contours of a certain historical development.

Seen thus, then, as rhetorically constituted by the process of plebeian struggle at different historical moments, the manic mode can nevertheless be anatomized as consistently exhibiting the following features: (1) a preoccupation with themes of socio-economic resentment; (2) a "levelling" use of lists and catalogues; (3) an excessive, often blasphemous wordplay; (4) a tendency to blend and thus level incongruous genres; (5) a justification of symbolic transgression, especially in the context of lay preaching, as prophetic behavior; and (7) imagery of self-fortification against persecution and martyrdom. The latter, all too often, is related to actual or threatened incarceration: for the likes of John Bunyan, Anna Trapnel, and George Fox – to name only three of the hundreds of radical Puritans who suffered political imprisonment – prison is thus often both a *topos* of martyrdom and an actual place.<sup>31</sup>

It should not be surprising, given that class formation has much to do with identity, that the manic mode attempts to reconfigure subjectivity itself. I propose, by way of contextual reframing, then, a historical study of the manic "I" as a transindividual site of political and ideological contestation. The many theorists concerned with the problematic of the discursive subject have encouraged me to see that manic texts, as a particular mode of signifying

<sup>30</sup> For a broader consideration of this historiographical issue – how to trace continuities in submerged patterns of popular heresy – see Hill, "From Lollards," pp. 89–116.

<sup>31</sup> See John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Cambridge University Press

052155022X - Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart - Clement Hawes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

subjectivity, cannot logically be detached from the specific fields of symbolic practices that surround them at a given historical moment.<sup>32</sup> Thus I shall argue that the mode of subjectivity inscribed in manic texts must be understood as overdetermined by the conflicts surrounding seventeenth-century radical religious politics.

The rhetorical mode I propose to call “manic” also invariably evinces, moreover, a tendency toward fusion with the reader addressed or the thing described: thus mania has its own *rhetoric of enunciation*. This is how the manic mode intersects with certain dynamics of the sublime. Rhetorical sublimity, according to the treatise on the sublime that tradition attributes to Longinus, can be achieved by sudden changes in the number and person of pronouns: from “I” to “we,” for instance, or from “I” to “you.”<sup>33</sup> The implications of such peculiar pronominalization, moreover, go beyond the domain of mere technique. Longinus’ approach to the sublime, as is well known, emphasizes the reader’s emotional response of ecstatic transport. But it is less a theory of actual readers and listeners, as Suzanne Guerlac demonstrates, than a rhetoric of enunciation.<sup>34</sup> The Longinian sublime has to do, that is to say, with the transgression of pronominal positions of speaker/writer and addressee in the event – the actual process – of spoken utterance or written enunciation. “The transport of the sublime,” to paraphrase Guerlac, includes “a slippage among the positions of enunciation”: as a result, the writing “I” gets “transported” into the message and the implied interlocutor achieves a fictive identification with the written “I.”<sup>35</sup>

So much more than aesthetic sublimity depends on pronouns. It is no longer news that pronouns are heavily laden with history, politics, and metaphysics. A conversational “we” may constitute a false consensus, a club of insiders luxuriating in their “innocently” unmarked and supposedly unsituated power to speak for others.<sup>36</sup> The so-called generic “he” evidently functions, by synecdoche, to universalize and normalize, as unmarked by gender specificity, the politically dominant sex. The apostrophe to a “thou”, whether to a heavenly father or a wild west wind, can position one as the specially elected invoker of a sacred presence. Such a “thou” makes presentational claims – one speaks to an unseen presence – and can serve equally well, as Jonathan Culler points out, as the vocational trademark of

<sup>32</sup> Kaja Silverman provides an elegant mapping of the converging “subjects” theorized in ethnology, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. See her *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. James A. Arieti and John M. Crossett (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), pp. 128–139.

<sup>34</sup> This terminology invokes the distinction made by linguist Emile Benveniste between the *énoncé* (the statement uttered) and *énonciation* (the act of uttering).

<sup>35</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, “Longinus and the subject of the sublime,” *New Literary History* 16:2 (1985), p. 275.

<sup>36</sup> See Marianna Torgovnick, “The politics of the ‘we,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91:1 (1992), pp. 43–63.