Poetic Expressions of Depression

Depictions of Depression in the Poetry of Thomas Hoccleve and Christopher Smart

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Introduction

In the past decades, the subject of mental illness has gained much greater acknowledgement. More and more studies appear on various mental illnesses, their possible origins, different manifestations, and the consequences people experience because of a mental illness in their own lives. For example, scholars such as Gavin Yamey, Rachel Perkins and Julie Repper have investigated what consequences people experience in modern day society when they are diagnosed with a mental illness. Yamey published an article in The BMJ in 1999, in which he states that "people with mental health problems are excluded from employment, education, and social services" (Yamey 1312). Perkins and Repper have more recently investigated the consequences of being diagnosed with mental health issues and published their findings in a 2013 edition of the *Neuropsychiatry* journal. They note that being diagnosed with a mental illness can be devastating, since "the prejudice and discrimination that surround a diagnosis of mental health problems ensures that many people with such diagnoses continue to be excluded in all facets of economic, social and civic life" (Perkins and Repper 377-378). Even nowadays, despite the information available on many mental illnesses, there is still much ignorance about mental illness and what it entails. As Perkins and Repper propose, informing people in the correct way is crucial to ensure a greater understanding of these issues. Studies like these are of great importance, since they create more openness about mental illness and its manifestations, which is necessary to reach the level of understanding that Perkins and Repper describe.

However, this new openness about mental health issues is not confined to scholarly works. Organisations that focus on health issues play a significant role in informing and supporting those who struggle with their health and the people around them. For example, the World Health Organisation "works worldwide to promote health, keep the world safe, and

serve the vulnerable" ("What we do"). Mental health is one of the issues that is addressed by the WHO. The WHO has a specific research team, called "The Mental Health: Evidence and Research team" or MER, which "is deeply committed to closing the gap between what is needed and what is currently available to reduce the burden of mental disorders worldwide and to promote mental health" ("Mental health evidence and research"). Organisations such as these have played and continue to play a significant role in the lessening of the taboo that rests on the subject of mental illness.

While the work of scholars and organisations has led to a greater openness about the subject of mental illness, those suffering from mental illness have contributed to this openness as well. These people, suffering from all kinds of mental illnesses, have become much more able to tell their own stories. This is partially because there is more information available on what specific mental illnesses entail, leading to a greater understanding of their illness and a wider acceptance and interest in personal accounts of the experiences these people go through. The various mediums now available through which these people can tell their stories have played a significant role in their ability to show people how they experience their mental illness. These mediums are not just books, but videos, blogs, forums, music and so on. Since these can be found on the internet, they are able to reach a much bigger audience at a much smaller production cost, thus making it easier for them to present others with images of their day-to-day lives and how their mental illness affects them.

One example of a person who uses technology to present others with her poetry on mental health issues is Taz Alam. Taz Alam is a YouTuber who discusses her personal experiences with depression and anxiety through spoken word poetry in her videos. The term "spoken word" is "a broad designation for poetry intended for performance" and these poems "frequently refer to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community" ("Spoken Word"). In her video "I'm Not Okay," she focuses on the numbness that can come with depression,

explaining how much depression may affect a person. She also mentions how others are not able to understand how complicated such an experience can be, leading to misguided attempts at helping her and giving her well-intended yet unhelpful advice (Alam). She thus uses a relatively new medium to explain her experiences with her mental health issues and to raise awareness of the personal experiences of sufferers of mental illness, specifically depression.

Although this focus on mental health issues is certainly a development that took place mainly in recent years, there have been attempts to understand such issues before. In this thesis, I will be taking a closer look at the works of two poets who are believed to have suffered from mental illness themselves. It is important to note that in literary studies, the crucial distinction is often made between the poet or author and the fictional narrator. This also means that a person's literary output does not necessarily reflect their mental state. However, I have chosen to consider these poems from the perspective of the poets themselves, rather than a fictional narrator. In the chapters I will briefly address for each poet why I have made this decision.

The first poet is Thomas Hoccleve, an English poet who lived at the end of the fourteenth century. He has referred to mental illness in several of his works, but the two works that stand out the most are found in the *Series*, which was written somewhere between 1419 and 1421, though the exact date remains unclear. *My Compleinte*, the first work of the *Series*, provides the reader with a remarkably personal perspective on depression, because Hoccleve chooses himself as the narrator and goes into great detail about his experiences with depression. It is this personal perspective that has led scholars to believe that *My Compleinte* may have been to some extent autobiographical. Another poem of Hoccleve's that will be more briefly discussed in this thesis is *Dialogue with a Friend*. The *Dialogue* deals with the issue of publication on mental illness. In this poem, Hoccleve describes a conversation he has with his Friend, who may be fictional, but as they discuss whether or not Hoccleve should

publish his *Compleinte,* it becomes clear that choosing to do so may cause him much trouble due to the view of society on those suffering from mental illness. This is one of the ways in which the cultural background of the poet influenced his works.

The second poet that will be discussed in this thesis is Christopher Smart, an eighteenth-century English poet most well-known nowadays for his religious works. One of these works is the *Jubilate Agno*. The *Jubilate Agno* is a poem written from a highly religious perspective and Smart continuously ties religious figures to earthly creatures, using God as the one connecting factor. Although this poem does not deal as directly with mental illness as Hoccleve's *Compleinte* and *Dialogue* does, it may still be considered to be suggestive of mental illness precisely due to its heavy focus on religion as well as the subtle references to Smart's personal life. Furthermore, Smart was confined from 1757 until 1763 to two different mental institutions, where he encountered a marginalized group that shared his experiences with confinement and faced the same sense of social isolation and exclusion. Despite the fact that it cannot be said with certainty why exactly Smart was confined, scholars nowadays believe that he may have suffered from bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression.

Hoccleve and Smart each may have suffered from a form of depression, but in their day and age, the concept of depression as we have now did not exist. It is therefore important to have a clear definition of depression in order to understand what is being investigated in this thesis, even if this is a modern view on depression. For Hoccleve, the most likely form of depression that he may have experienced is clinical depression. According to the psychiatrist Dr. Daniel K. Hall-Flavin, clinical depression as understood in this day and age "is the more-severe form of depression, also known as major depression or major depressive disorder"(Hall-Flavin). He sums up some of the most significant symptoms, such as "feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness", "sleep disturbances", "anxiety, agitation or restlessness", "slowed thinking, speaking or body movements", "feelings of worthlessness

or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame", "trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things" and "frequent or recurrent thoughts of death" (Hall-Flavin). Several of these symptoms can be found particularly in Hoccleve's work.

Smart's depression differs from that which Hoccleve experienced. Melissa R. Quigg investigates "the notion of where certain mental experiences such as mania or depression intersect with the written word to produce a creative document" (Quigg iv). She states that the "*Jubilate Agno* manifests the experience of bipolar disorder" (Quigg viii). Psychiatrist R.H. Belmaker states of bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, that "the unique hallmark of the illness is mania" (Belmaker 476). He describes bipolar disorder as follows, starting with an explanation of the symptoms of mania:

> It is characterized by elevated mood or euphoria, overactivity with a lack of need for sleep, and an increased optimism that usually becomes so extreme that the patient's judgment is impaired … The depression that alternates with manic episodes (bipolar depression) is characterized by more familiar symptoms. (Belmaker 476)

This definition of bipolar disorder shows that both mania and depression are experienced by the person who suffers from this disorder. However, Belmaker does not mention the potential relationship between bipolar disorder and religiousness, and it is this relationship that is crucial to our understanding of Smart's *Jubilate Agno*.

The psychiatrist Arjan W. Braam does explain how religion stands in relation to bipolar disorder, or manic depression. He discusses how the new awareness of having a mental illness is akin to a loss situation and may cause grief reactions (Braam 106). Braam mentions four aspects of the relationship between religiousness and manic depression: "Symptom formation", "religious experiences during mania", "religious preoccupations as early sign", and "disillusionment with religion" (Braam 106). One of the most important

things Braam mentions is that "during mania, many patients experience states of enlightenment and increased religious motivation, which easily shift to the level of religious delusions" (106). A sudden increase in religiousness in those suffering from bipolar disorder is nowadays recognized as sign of a manic episode and Braam notes that patients are aware of the distrust this causes in their doctors, thus making increased religiousness the subject of suspicion. However, religion does not just affect a person during a manic episode. After such an episode, when the person enters a depressive episode, the new disillusionment regarding religion creates another feeling of loss, increasing the feeling of grief. As Braam states: "Religion may become the subject of cycling itself" (106).

Apart from the terms 'clinical depression', 'bipolar disorder', and manic depression, the more general terms 'mental illness' and 'depression' will be used as well in this thesis. When the term 'mental illness' is used, it either denotes mental illness in general, for example depression or anxiety, or, more particularly, it denotes that which the contemporary society of the poet being discussed in a particular chapter saw as mental illness. This contemporary view will be more narrowly defined where necessary in each chapter. Mental illness may also denote various degrees of depression, which "ranges in seriousness from mild, temporary episodes of sadness to severe, persistent depression" (Hall-Flavin). When it is applied specifically to the case of Thomas Hoccleve, the term 'depression' will denote clinical depression. When it is applied to Christopher Smart's case, 'depression' will denote bipolar disorder. The term 'depression' will generally be used to denote these two separate forms of depression as experienced by these poets.

This thesis will illustrate that the experience of depression and its depiction in poetry show similarities over time, while also highlighting how these depictions differ greatly depending on the poet's type of depression, their personal and cultural background, and the degree to which they chose to use their personal perspective and experiences. This will be

done by addressing these symptoms as found in the poems of Hoccleve and Smart, keeping in mind the symptoms that have been put forward by Hall-Flavin, Belmaker, and Braam, while also providing information on how the poet's contemporaries interpreted mental illnesses and looking at the changing cultural context. Furthermore, their personal situation will be kept in mind to explain any personal references. This framework, being a combination of modern and historical knowledge, will be used to understand such mental illnesses from both a modern point of view as well as within the historical context of the poems.

Mental illness, and specifically depression, has often been used as subject in literature and shows many similar features, such as the symptoms that are addressed. Yet the way in which a specific mental illness is described and explained in literature, though similar in some ways, can differ greatly from century to century, from decade to decade, and most importantly, from person to person. The concept of mental illness is defined by the people in certain cultures, and so it is influenced by whichever development is taking place in that culture. This could be a political, scientific, or religious development, for example.

Chapter 1

Thomas Hoccleve's *My Compleinte*

Personal Background

Thomas Hoccleve (c. 1368-1426) was an English poet and clerk. He is most well-known for his poetic works *La Male Regle* and the *Series*, which contained both *My Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend*. Although little is known about his youth, from the age of 18 onwards, he "obtained a clerkship in the privy seal office in London", working there for 35 years ("Thomas Hoccleve"). Since his clerical position at this Privy Seal office was a significant part of his life, it is no surprise that in several of his writings he discusses the work conditions and the issue of receiving payment for the work that he and his colleagues did. J.A. Burrow mentions in his Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture that this was no ordinary office either and that "they lived communally at the *hospicium private sigilli*, or Privy Seal hostel" (Burrow 405). Because this was a community, Hoccleve at times not only pleaded for himself to get paid, but pleaded for them too and even described the conditions under which they all had to work.

Those works in which Hoccleve describes his work environment provide the reader with a way to construct an image of what his regular life looked like. For example, the financial struggles he describes in *La Male Regle* to Fourneval, at that time the King's Treasurer, were likely not simply a result of what Burrow describes as "the poet's excesses in his riotous youth" (Burrow 409). These struggles may have been a result of events such as Hoccleve reports in his *Regement of Princes*, where he describes "one of the tricks by which they were deprived of the legitimate rewards of their labours" (Burrow 406). Furthermore, these works also show that Hoccleve was capable of manipulating language to create vivid images of his environment through text. For example, in the *Regement of Princes*, "the

contrast between the talking, singing, and joking in a craftsman's shop and the 'trauaillous stillnesse' of the Privy Seal office is drawn with great precision and economy of language" (Burrow 406). Not only did Hoccleve live with his colleagues in a community; he was expected to work in silence and was often not paid for the work he did. Although Hoccleve was a clerk working for the court, his circumstances were not ideal and he had a tendency to complain about such things in his petitionary poems.

This work environment about which he complains in such petitionary poems may have played a part in Hoccleve's eventual mental illness, or what we nowadays would consider depression, which supposedly happened around 1414 and consequently led to the *Series* being written. The *Series* contain Hoccleve's two personal accounts previously mentioned of his period of mental illness and the consequences he experienced within his society. Evidence can be found in Hoccleve's case that indicates the narrator and poet could be seen as the same person and that what has been described in the *Series* may be considered a real and personal account by Hoccleve the poet, rather than a story by a fictional narrator. For example, Hoccleve in his works describes himself unfavourably; as Burrow states, "the poet's own confession that he was 'dull' and learned 'little or nothing' from his master Chaucer is still commonly accepted as a fair summary of his achievement" (389).

One reason that we ought to take Hoccleve's negative perception of himself, others, and his personal experiences seriously can be found in in his poems *My Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend*. He most likely wrote these first two parts of the *Series* from either 1419 or 1421 onwards. There appears to be no consensus among scholarship as to the exact date of the production of the *Series*, though Burrow dates specifically the *Dialogue* to 1419 based on a reference to "Humphrey of Gloucester's first, not his second, spell as 'lieutenant'" (Burrow 395). *My Compleinte* deals with the aftermath of Hoccleve's mental breakdown regarding the way he believes the rest of society looks at him five years after the actual event.

The *Dialogue* deals with the issue of publishing works on mental health like the *Compleinte* and what consequences this may have in turn. The latter will be discussed mainly in the second chapter of this thesis, but the main focus of the first chapter will be on the depiction of depression in *My Compleinte*. In *My Compleinte*, Hoccleve utilizes his cultural background and the social expectations of how mental illness manifests itself in a person to create a depiction of depression. Subtle references to his personal background and the fact that he explores the matter of mental illness, particularly depression, in several of his other works suggest that mental illness was an issue that regularly occupied his mind. It may have even been the case that he suffered from depression himself.

My Compleinte

Hoccleve's depiction of depression encompasses the entirety of *My Compleinte*, starting with the opening passages. The start of *My Compleinte* sets the tone for the rest of the poem and is an indication of Hoccleve's well-being. He begins by describing the season of autumn arriving, a time often associated with decay. Hoccleve indeed does bring up the idea that life is temporary and no man can escape death, creating a remarkably negative view of the world. This description of the autumn season is particularly significant because it would have reminded Hoccleve's contemporaries of the 'spring opening'. Paul Zumthor claims that this type of opening, which nearly always referred to spring, "reveals the following structure: an indication of time + notation bearing on a season of the year" (58). Spring is a time filled with positivity, in which nature blooms once more and life begins anew. Zumthor notes that there are "171 realizations of this structure" to be found in medieval literature (58). It must have been a very familiar structure and any variation would likely have been noticed by the audience. An example of such a spring opening would have been found in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which starts with the lines: "Whan that April with his showres soote /

The droughte of March hath perced to the roote" (Chaucer 1-2). Hoccleve chooses autumn as his main season and instead of highlighting new life, he presents a direct challenge to this 'spring opening' and subverts it by speaking of death and describing a pessimistic view on the world. The passage following directly after this opening only serves to highlight this negative view:

> Þat is euery wightes conclusioun;
> Which for to weyue / is in no mannes might,
> How riche he be / strong, lusty, fressh and gay.
> And in thende / of Nouembre vpon a nyght,
> Sighynge sore / as I in my bed lay
> For this and othir thought / which many a day
> Before I took / sleep cam noon in myn ye,
> So vexid me / the thoghtful maladie. (Hoccleve 14-21)

This passage is notable because it presents the first unambiguous reference to Hoccleve's depression. Hoccleve states that he is unable to sleep due to "the thoghtful maladie". He then continues on this thought by reflecting on his past experiences with his mental illness:

> I sy wel syn I / with seeknesse last
> Was scourgid / cloudy hath been the fauour
> Þat shoon on me / ful bright in tymes past.
> The sonne abated / and the dirke shour
> Hildid doun right on me / and in langour
> Me made swymme / so þat my spiryt
> To lyve / no lust hadde / ne delyt. (Hoccleve 22-28)

What Hoccleve describes here has raised questions regarding the chronology of his experiences among scholars such as Rory G. Critten. Critten refers to Matthew Boyd Goldie's observation that despite Hoccleve's claim that he has now fully recovered from his illness, the opening to this poem presents us with a questionable chronology that undermines this claim. Critten places the emphasis on the word 'last' and claims that the use of this word indicates that Hoccleve is unable to say with certainty that he is currently well, having made a full recovery from his past illness, and that he will remain well in the future. Critten then asks: "Does 'last' here mean that he has been ill before and may thus fall ill again?" (Critten 404).

This "confused chronology" is thought by Critten to add to the image of Hoccleve being mentally unstable in spite of his claim that God returned his wits to him. If Hoccleve indeed presents the reader with an ambiguous chronology, it would testify to his mental illness because it would show that he is apparently unable to keep track of events occurring in his own life. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Hall-Flavin lists "remembering things" as a symptom of clinical depression. Hoccleve's confusion in this passage about the chronology of his personal experiences could as such be indicative of the clinical depression described by Hall-Flavin. Yet the question is whether this passage should be seen as chronologically problematic at all. While Critten claims there is a "blurring of the temporal distinctions" (404), his explanation as to why this passage presents the reader with a "confused chronology" remains fairly vague.

In fact, another interpretation is possible in which it would seem that there is no actual issue with the chronology. While Hoccleve may have spent the majority of his life without depression, he may have truly become mentally ill in the past, leading to the mental breakdown he mentions five years prior to the time in which the *Compleinte* is set. This mental breakdown, which presumably happened in 1414, must have followed a time in Hoccleve's life in which he felt relatively happy. Following this breakdown, he received this

"fauour", essentially meaning his return to the happiness he had known before 1414. Yet he describes this favour as "cloudy", indicating that he now knows it would not last. Indeed, at the time in which the poem is set, around 1419 and thus approximately five years after his first breakdown, he describes that he finds himself lying in bed unable to sleep. He recognizes this inability to sleep and his negative train of thought as symptoms of his previous "thoghtful maladie". As such, there is not truly any confusion about the chronology, because Hoccleve simply goes back and forth between being well and being ill, referring to the happiness that he experiences between 1414 and 1419 in the line: "cloudy hath been the fauour þat shoon on me" (23-24). Despite the return to former happiness, he may have come to the realisation that this happiness was only temporary and that his depression would return one day, as it has at this point in the poem. In this case, the word 'last' actually does not need to raise questions about whether or not Hoccleve believes this illness may return, since lines 14-28 show that he knows the illness has already returned.

Although Critten has a different view of this passage which is by no means irrelevant, the interpretation just described shows that regardless of whether the chronology is considered clear or confusing, Hoccleve would still be considered as a person who indeed is mentally ill at the time of writing this poem. Hoccleve recalls a previous breakdown and states clearly that he is not able to sleep because of his "thoghtful maladie", meaning the negative thoughts that come with his depression. The interpretation given in this thesis clarifies the chronology and shows that Hoccleve remembers the symptoms he describes in *My Compleinte* from past experiences. Since these lines are found at the start of the poem, the reader is immediately aware that Hoccleve's focus is on his depression. Moreover, despite his many claims throughout the poem that he is well and it is simply others who do not see past his mental breakdown of a few years prior, his initial admission to being kept awake at night by his

darker thoughts makes the reader already question whether he is not trying to convince himself of his well-being rather than any readers.

One way in which Hoccleve does clearly try to convince others that he is mentally stable is by adapting his appearance to what he feels he should look like in order to come across as normal. One passage in particular in *My Compleinte* comes to mind when Hoccleve's focus on his appearance is considered:

> And in my chambre at hoom / whan þat I was
> Myself allone / I in this wyse wroghte:
> I streighte vnto my mirour / and my glas
> To looke how þat me / of my cheere thoghte,
> If any othir were it / than it oghte;
> For fayn wolde I / if it had nat been right,
> Amendid it / to my konnynge and might.
>
> Many a saut made I / to this mirour
> Thynkynge / 'If þat I looke / in this maneere
> Among folk / as I now do / noon errour
> Of suspect look / may in my face appeere.
> This contenance / I am seur / and this cheere
> If I foorth vse / is no thyng repreeuable
> To hem þat han / conceites resonable.' (Hoccleve 155-168)

His focus on suppressing outward signs of his mental illness indicates that there are societal expectations of what a person with a mental illness is supposed to look and act like. Hoccleve's mental illness, as has been suggested in the introduction, would have been clinical depression, which Hall-Flavin has explained is a severe type of depression. However, the

concept of clinical depression did not yet exist in Hoccleve's time to describe his experiences with his mental illness. Instead, there were societal expectations of what they considered to be symptoms of a more general 'madman', a person who displayed abnormal behaviour as a result of a mental illness. Hoccleve would more specifically have been considered a 'melancholic'. The symptoms of his mental illness are discussed by Penelope B.R. Doob, who observes that these symptoms are depicted in various of Hoccleve's other works as well, showing that mental illness is a significant topic in his mind. For example, in his *Regement of Princes,* Hoccleve shows more extreme signs of what would be seen as mental illness in his day:

> Hoccleve's state the next morning is that of the textbook melancholic: desiring solitude and hoping to shun joy (ll. 85-98), he goes into the fields where he wanders in a mental condition near to madness … Unawareness of what goes on about him, intense anxiety, chills and fever, waking delusions, the desire for death: all these are typical of the melancholic (Doob 216-217).

The idea of the 'textbook melancholic' that Doob describes comes from the theory of the four humours. This theory goes back to ancient Greece and the idea was that "the body was made up of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, and fluctuations among these elements determined the health of both the body and the mind" (Sullivan 884). Black bile in particular caused the melancholy that Doob speaks of and Erin Sullivan explains that although the concept of melancholy changed throughout time, it was a concept that persisted in society until the nineteenth-century Freudian theory, when "melancholy began to be seen as an increasingly rare condition, with diagnoses of depression finding favour among doctors instead" (Sullivan 885). However, this theory of the four bodily humours was still very familiar to Hoccleve and his contemporaries. This would have meant that Hoccleve was aware of the typical symptoms that society believed were signs of melancholy. As a result of

this awareness of societal beliefs, Hoccleve's depression is depicted according to these symptoms of melancholy in the *Regement of Princes* and several of his other works.

These visible symptoms of melancholy that Hoccleve depicts in his works are based on society's expectations of what a mental illness such as his depression would look like. This apparently obvious visibility of mental illness in the Middle Ages has also been commented on by Stephen Harper. Harper mentions some of the more excessive symptoms of mental illness as given in medical texts of that time. For example, these medical texts described a maniac as a person who "screamed and tore both his flesh and his clothes," while "the melancholic had a surplus of black bile and was therefore identifiable by his swarthy complexion" (Harper 388). Harper thus concludes that in the Middle Ages, the expectation was that "insanity was visible" (388), both in behaviour and appearance. He continues by refuting this observation and he states that "even in the Middle Ages madness could also be seen as a secret or hidden affliction" (Harper 388).

Harper's main focus lies on explaining how the physical appearance of a person does not always reflect the issues of their inner life and he considers Hoccleve's poems to show exactly that mismatch between this inner life and his appearance. This idea is summed up by Harper's statement that "the body cannot be trusted to manifest any sort of inner truth" (392). Although this is generally an accurate observation to make, Hoccleve's concern in the passage makes sense when the society he lived in is taken into consideration. As Burrow states, Hoccleve's friends "watch for signs of his former brain-sickness in his present ways of walking and standing and looking" (Burrow 399). Even if Hoccleve is right in implying that a person's physical appearance does not necessarily demonstrate any inner turmoil, this idea that mental illness is a visible, tangible thing for which proof can be found in appearance and behaviour is deeply ingrained in his society. In Hoccleve's case, this idea of mental illness being visible is filtered through and enhanced by his past experience and his current state of

mind, which is why he so strongly emphasizes the importance of looking as normal as possible.

As mentioned previously by Doob, Hoccleve focuses on these apparently visible symptoms of his mental illness in his other works as well. This demonstrates his continued interest in the matter of mental illness. Doob highlights the symptoms of what she calls the "textbook melancholic" in his *Regement of Princes*, in which Hoccleve shows more extreme signs of what would be seen as mental illness in his time. In *My Compleinte*, Hoccleve describes various experiences similar to those he described in the *Regement*. He begins the *Compleinte* as mentioned before, by ruminating on death and decay and being unable to sleep because of these thoughts, and he seeks solitude as a result of feeling cast out by society. There is also an instance where there are indeed obvious physical signs of his mental illness: Harper observes that in lines 148-154, directly before the passage with the mirror, Hoccleve mentions "public shaking and sweating," which "are suggestive of what we might now call a panic disorder" (Harper 390). Hoccleve throughout the poem generally displays much concern about the way he is perceived by others, leading to him scrutinizing the way he looks, since any such signs would alert them of his illness having returned.

This act of observing himself in such a strict manner is also exactly where Hoccleve's experience diverts from what Doob describes; instead of having lost sight of reality, it seems as if he is hyperaware of it. He not only tries to control the more obvious signs such as shaking and sweating, but in lines 155-168 he puts the focus on his facial expressions. He scrutinizes the smallest changes that may give away the state of his mind, yet he does not stop at practising these expressions once in a while. Hoccleve appears to check these expressions very often, since he admits that "many a saut made I / to this mirour" (Hoccleve 162). This indicates that Hoccleve obsessively and perhaps abruptly checked his expressions in the mirror many times to teach himself to stay composed at all times. What he does not seem to

acknowledge is that these obsessive leaps to the mirror and the general obsession with his expressions are what would cause others to question his sanity and that the subtle changes in his face are fairly unlikely to be noticed. He practises these normal facial expressions abnormally often. However, despite the abnormality of his actions, it is understandable that he tries to ensure that his face shows the proper expressions at all times. Since Hoccleve suggests he has a history of mental illness and already feels that others look at him suspiciously, he would want to take away any reason for others to believe that he is suffering from mental illness again. In Harper's words, "Thomas is aware … of being a spectacle" (390).

Hoccleve's obsession with appearing normal could be seen as a sign of mental illness. This obsession demonstrates that his interpretation of how others see him is strongly influenced by his own fears, rather than by any objective information. He may seem to be hyperaware of his surroundings and of reality, but in truth he has indeed lost his grip on it and is on the verge of being paranoid. He sees everything through his personal framework of depression and interprets all that other people do as being against him. Even Hoccleve himself shows some awareness of this distortion in his perception of the world and he claims to be aware that "men in hire owne cas / been blynde alday" (Hoccleve 170). He acknowledges that others may experience his illness very differently if at all. As Harper states, "the *Complaint* is concerned not only with the possibility of insanity, but also with the experience of subjectivity or inwardness" (393). Despite Hoccleve's vague awareness of his own subjective view which may have been influenced by his mental illness, it is logical for him to continue to contemplate his actions and his appearance. His obsession with appearing normal is derived from the cultural expectation that mental illness is visible. In general, a person's view of the world is to some extent determined by the culture in which they live and Hoccleve is no exception.

While in Hoccleve's time society believed that mental illness was visible, this is no longer a generally accepted view. This is the result of many developments throughout time in science, religion, politics, literature and other fields that strongly influence the understanding people in any culture have of matters such as mental illness. These developments explain why the fifteenth-century Hoccleve interprets his poem and his illness in a very different way than for example the nineteenth-century Furnivall does, whose personal view will be discussed later in this thesis. Furthermore, such cultural developments also allow us to shed a new light on Hoccleve's description of depression and its consequences. In this thesis, some of the symptoms of mental illness as it was seen in Hoccleve's time have been named by Doob and since these can be found in other works of Hoccleve as well, there must have been strong ideas present in his mind about mental illness and the way it manifests itself in a person.

The culture in which Hoccleve lives also explains why he finds the cause and solution for his depression in religion. As discussed before, Hoccleve's contemporaries saw imbalances of the four humours in the body as one potential cause of mental illness. Yet these imbalances were not the only things blamed for mental illness. Marion Turner notes that "illness was not seen as something that could ultimately be explained by purely scientific causes," and that it "was routinely understood to be related to sin and immorality" (62). Doob explains more clearly this link between sin and mental illness, or 'madness', as she calls it, as it was seen in Hoccleve's time:

> Madness was considered an especially appropriate consequence of sin: first, because sin involves a disorder in the soul which is fitly manifested as a disorder in the mind; second, because insanity and possession by the devil – and therefore by sin – were often equated; and third, because reason, the image of God in man, is destroyed both in sin and in madness … The dominant religious view, as we have seen, was that all sin was mad, and that most madmen were sinners. (Doob 209)

This "dominant religious view" that was so prevalent in society at the time influenced Hoccleve's description of the origins of his mental illness. As Burrow states, "there is no reason to think that Hoccleve himself, musing on his traumatic experience, would have attempted to understand it otherwise than in the religious terms of his age" (Burrow 399-400). As previously mentioned, Turner notes that Hoccleve and his contemporaries viewed sin as a cause for mental illness and in the *Compleinte* he describes that he believed that God chose who became ill and when. The following two passages illustrate the influence of religion on Hoccleve's view on his depression and its causes:

> Almighty God / as lykith his goodnesse,
> Visiteth folk al day / as men may see,
> With los of good / and bodily seeknesse,
> And among othir / he forgat nat me;
> Witnesse vpon / the wylde infirmitee
> Which þat I hadde / as many a man wel kneew,
> And which me out of myself / caste and threew.
>
> It was so knowen to the peple / and kowth
> Þat conseil was it noon / ne nat be mighte.
> How it with me stood / was in euery mowth,
> And þat ful sore / my freendes affrighte.
> They for myn helthe / pilgrimages highte
> And soghte hem / some on hors and some on foote,
> God yilde it hem / to gete me my boote. (Hoccleve 36-49)

According to Hoccleve's first passage, God is able to bring people illness. In Hoccleve's eyes, the fact that he suffers from mental illness proves this claim, along with the

social consequences he believes he endures. Furthermore, he claims that his friends went on pilgrimages to appease God to earn back Hoccleve's health. This shows that in the medieval mind, there is a strange link between cause and effect. The cause is a sinful life for which God punishes. The effect in Hoccleve's case is depression, followed by social isolation.

He yaf me wit / and he took it away
Whan þat he sy / þat I it mis despente,
And yaf ageyn / whan it was to his pay.
He grauntid me / my giltes to repente
And hens forward / to sette myn entente
Vnto his deitee / to do plesance
And tamende / my synful gouernance. (Hoccleve 400-406)

This second passage highlights that the reason why Hoccleve now endures depression is because his good health has not been earned. God is not pleased with Hoccleve's sinful way of living and to regain good health, Hoccleve has to repent and turn his mind to the worship of God. Doob accurately describes his attitude as follows: "He sees his madness and his consequent trials as loving punishment sent by God, and he will take all for the best" (223). Hoccleve interprets his illness as a divine way in which He "reminds Hoccleve of God's true power in the world" (Turner 68). Hoccleve's interpretation of his illness demonstrates that the idea that God rules all is strongly embedded in his society. His search for a reason for his illness within religion may be in order to give meaning to it within the grander scheme of existence, which in turn may help him cope with his experiences.

Doob explains that in the late medieval period people saw a powerful link between sin and mental illness, stating that "madness was considered an especially appropriate consequence of sin" (209). Each of the reasons Doob then mentions is relevant to Hoccleve's poem: God punishes Hoccleve for sin with depression, or a "disorder in the mind"; Hoccleve

focuses on his appearance which leads back to the link between insanity and possession; and Hoccleve's perception of reality is distorted. He is thus clearly unwell. Doob also questions why Hoccleve would accuse himself of being mad, especially considering the consequences he claims to already endure (228). But here too, the link between sin and madness returns. In fact, the poem about his mental illness is seen through the lens of religion and sin. Essentially, sin was believed to cause mental illness, something which people believed they could witness. As mental illness was considered visible, it was also a perfect vehicle to show the bad consequences of living a sinful life. This poem can be seen as Hoccleve's attempt at both a cautionary tale, warning its reader not to sin, as well as an uplifting tale to show that he believed that his own illness and other consequences of sin can be overcome. This may be done by atoning for the sins and immersing oneself in religion and the worship of God. This way, good health may also be restored. That Hoccleve is so intent in these passages to assume God can take away and restore health and sanity illustrates that this link between sin and madness, as well as religion and illness, was not something taken lightly in his time and by Hoccleve himself.

The subject of mental illness, particularly depression, returns in several of Hoccleve's works. In *My Compleinte*, Hoccleve chose to describe depression from a perspective that appears to be remarkably personal and which for this reason stands out among other medieval accounts of mental illness. Not only has the personal perspective of this poem caused many scholars to see it as an autobiography, but *My Compleinte* shows that Hoccleve is strongly influenced by society and cultural expectations. The spring opening that Hoccleve chooses to subvert would have been familiar to his contemporaries and his subversion of it sets the tone for the rest of the poem. Furthermore, there were societal expectations regarding mental illness. One of these expectations was that mental illness is visible, which explains Hoccleve's extreme occupation with his appearance in this poem. Another expectation regarding mental

health issues is that the origin of such an illness should be looked for in religion. Sin was seen as the cause of mental illness and Hoccleve links this to his personal circumstances. He refers to his sinful behaviour when he was young which caused him to suffer financially as well as mentally. Yet if sin is seen as the cause of mental illness in the *Compleinte*, even within the *Series* another cause for Hoccleve's suffering is proposed in *Dialogue with a Friend*. More importantly, in this second part of the *Series*, the issue of the publication of the *Series* and its possible consequences in Hoccleve's society stands at the centre of discussion.

Chapter 2

Thomas Hoccleve's *Dialogue with a Friend*

In the *Dialogue with a Friend*, the second part of Hoccleve's *Series*, Hoccleve presents the reader with the debate regarding whether or not he should publish *My Compleinte* and the *Series*. He does so by describing a conversation that was supposedly held between himself and a Friend who visited him. He allows the Friend to read *My Compleinte*, but the Friend does not react as favourably as Hoccleve had hoped. He is displeased when the Friend advises him not to publish *My Compleinte* and not to continue his efforts to write the *Series*, mainly for the sake of his reputation and his health. The Friend is initially not convinced that it would be beneficial for Hoccleve to publish a work that details the poet's experiences with mental illness and the consequences he claims to experience in society. Although later in the *Dialogue*, this Friend changes his mind after he hears Hoccleve's arguments, the focus on the issue of publication on Hoccleve's mental illness, particularly on the risk of it potentially affecting his reputation, demonstrates a fear present in Hoccleve's mind that may have been rooted in the way society viewed and treated those suffering from mental illness. However, the publication of the *Series* does not seem to have had any negative impact on Hoccleve's life. Rather, it seems to be the case that the personal nature of the *Series*, especially of *My Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend*, might have been the reason that the transmission of this work was limited in the first place.

In the *Dialogue*, Hoccleve and his Friend discuss various issues regarding the publication of the *Series*. They debate why Hoccleve should or should not publish such personal accounts, what reasons Hoccleve has for doing so in spite of the consequences he fears, and eventually, what other works should be included in the *Series*. However, when the Friend initially advises Hoccleve not to continue the work at all, the origins of this mental illness are debated as well. Rather than accepting Hoccleve's view that God is punishing him

for having lived a sinful life, the Friend proposes a different cause that is not at all related to the divine. As Doob states: "The friend, of course, is accepting the common view that study leads to melancholy madness, and he kindly attributes Hoccleve's former insanity to such a neutral cause"(225). She refers to lines 379-82 of the *Dialogue*:

> Of studie was engendred thy seeknesse,
> And þ*a*t was hard / Woldest [thow] now agayn
> Entre into þ*a*t laborious bisynesse,
> Syn it thy mynde and eek thy wit had slayn? (Hoccleve 379-382)

However, this is only a small part of the *Dialogue* and its message to Hoccleve not to continue these studies and writings does not only have to do with this causing his illness, but with the reception by the audience of works such as the *Compleinte*. The Friend does not expect this to be in Hoccleve's favour and strongly discourages him to publish the work:

> 'Þat I shal seyn / shal be of good entente;
> Hast thow maad this conpleynte / foorth to go
> Among the peple?' / 'Yee, freend, so I mente,
> What elles?' / 'Nay, Thomas, waar / do nat so.
> If thow be wys / of þat mateere ho!
> Reherce thow it nat / ne it awake;
> Keepe al þat cloos / for thyn honoures sake. (Hoccleve 22-28)

This passage illustrates that Hoccleve's social status would be in jeopardy if he were to publish the *Compleinte,* a consequence that his Friend warns him about. Yet Turner and Burrow question whether this Friend is anything more than a manifestation of a conflict within Hoccleve's own mind. Burrow points out that Hoccleve is not able to create distinct voices, but that his true skills lie "in the articulation of his own voice" (Burrow 402), an

observation added to by Turner's claim that in the *Dialogue*, these "debating voices can easily be read as representing a debate within Hoccleve himself about what has happened to him" (Turner 70). Not only may Hoccleve be questioning his experiences, but if the *Dialogue* is read as a debate in Hoccleve's own mind, he could be referring to the way society reacts to such personal accounts, especially to what could have been considered an admission to suffering from mental illness.

One such reaction is exemplified by lines 22-28 of the *Dialogue*, in which the Friend points out that Hoccleve's publication of the *Compleinte* could cause him to ruin his reputation. Yet society may have reacted more drastically towards such personal accounts than merely avoiding Hoccleve the way he describes in the *Compleinte*. Hoccleve may have feared that the publication of the *Compleinte* could cause people to question his mental health and become suspicious of him. This suspicion could have led to more drastic measures that would have affected Hoccleve's entire life. For example, the risk of being locked up in a mental institution could have been a consequence that Hoccleve feared while writing the *Compleinte* and the *Dialogue*, mostly because he openly admits that he has had mental health problems before in these particular poems.

People who suffered from mental illness were generally misunderstood and were consequently mistreated. An example of the poor treatment that those with a mental illness received in Hoccleve's time is the Bethlem Royal Hospital. This was later nicknamed Bedlam, since "the asylum became notorious for its terrible conditions, under which people were chained and lived in squalor" (Kelly). Logically, this debate in Hoccleve's mind about whether or not publishing his works is a good idea may have been a result of an awareness of this kind of treatment. He could indeed have risked being placed in such an institution as a result of the publication of his poetry, since much about his *Compleinte* indicates that he is not as well as he claims to be.

The reason why it did not seem to have had this result when Hoccleve did publish the *Series* is brought up by Critten, who mainly considers the transmission of Hoccleve's work. Critten brings attention to the circulation history of these works and says that "it seems useful to consider whether qualities intrinsic to the opening sections of the complete *Series* may have led to their relatively narrow circulation and to the somewhat limited transmission history of the collection as a whole" (Critten 403). He compares the fact that "there exist only five complete copies of the *Series* besides Hoccleve's autograph" to the much larger number of manuscripts left of another of Hoccleve's works, the *Regement* (Critten 403). The *Regement* "is extant in forty-three manuscripts, making it one of the most popular English poems of the century," despite the similarity it shows to the *Series* of having a personal account moving "into translations of advice literature" (Critten 403).

Critten suggests that the highly personal nature of these opening sections of the *Series* prevented wide circulation, simply because "few fifteenth-century readers beyond the author's initial addressees enjoyed the poet's artful self-portraiture *per se*"(Critten 387). Of course, it is possible that the readers did read a part of the opening sections. However, it may have been the case that they quickly concluded that the content of these poems could not be applied to their situation. Therefore, these works would not have been considered worth the effort to read and copy for further circulation. This would suggest that there were few readers of Hoccleve's work who actually bothered to read these more personal parts in their entirety to begin with. The *Compleinte* and the *Dialogue,* containing Hoccleve's depiction of his depression and his ultimate breakdown, would as such not have been read in detail, if they were read at all. It is thus unlikely that he truly risked being locked away for his depiction of depression.

Furthermore, the *Series* appears to have been frequently separated into parts instead of being circulated as a complete work. Critten observes that "the late medieval readers …

reproduced and highlighted those elements of Hoccleve's corpus that they could already recognize and most easily turn to their own purposes" (406). These 'elements' were the more generally applicable parts, rather than such personal accounts as *My Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend*. Readers could often not relate to works that were mostly made up of highly personal content. They tended to focus on works they could both read and use in the context of their own lives. Accounts of personal experiences were therefore not likely to become very popular because they could not easily be transformed to fit another person's situation. This means that those who did read these two more personal works were unlikely to include them in the list of works they chose to reproduce or highlight, precisely because they were unable to relate to the content.

Since these works were often left out, they did not get as much exposure to the audience as the other works in the *Series*. This explains why these first two parts did not have a major impact, nor do they seem to have resulted in Hoccleve's social status becoming lower. Still, the *Dialogue* illustrates that there was such a fear present in Hoccleve's mind, which may have been grounded in his own paranoia regarding how others perceived him. The fact that the *Series* had such little impact on his life and on society was partially the result of the way works were published in his time, but it may also be suggestive of society's attitude towards personal accounts, particularly those dealing with mental illness as Hoccleve's works do. As previously mentioned, people were suspicious of those who suffered from mental illness and since they may not have been particularly interested in personal accounts to begin with, it is likely that these types of personal accounts were ignored.

The various issues Hoccleve describes in the *Compleinte* and the *Dialogue* show that Hoccleve depicted depression according to societal expectations. It has been explained how his depiction of depression in the *Compleinte* shows several similarities to society's view of the 'melancholic'. Furthermore, Hoccleve's obsession with his appearance is derived from the

societal view that mental illness was visible and that a person's appearance could give such an illness away. However, he also depicted this mental illness in such great detail that these works suggest he may have been struggling with depression himself. The subject of mental illness, particularly depression, returned in several of his other works as well, showing that the subject was of great significance to him. Furthermore, he was greatly concerned about the publication of works dealing with his mental health issues. He feared the possible consequences he might experience in a society that was suspicious of those who suffered from mental illness. Throughout the following centuries, a new view on mental health issues began to develop in society. However, this has been a slow process and it is only relatively recently that mental illness is truly considered an illness.

To compare how much this view has changed, an example of a view on Hoccleve's work will be given from the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century philologist F. J. Furnivall edited Hoccleve's works and his personal views on Hoccleve illustrate how difficult it is to change society's views on subjects such as mental health. Furnivall has shown sympathy towards Hoccleve, despite Hoccleve's own unfavourable descriptions of himself. Furnivall also "described the poet as a 'weak, sensitive, look-on-the-worst side kind of man', adding that 'we wish he had been a better poet and a manlier fellow'" (Critten 406-7). Rather than seeing Hoccleve's depression as a mental illness which may be treated, Furnivall considers Hoccleve's pessimistic view on life to be a flaw in Hoccleve's personality. Yet this perspective may be understood when the context in which Furnivall was writing is taken into account.

Furnivall lived in a century that witnessed great changes in how mental illness and those suffering from mental illness were perceived. Changes began to be made in the treatment and living conditions of the mentally ill and different mental illnesses began to be distinguished, though this happened very slowly. As Caroline Howe summarizes in her article

on Kathryn Burtinshaw and John Burt's book *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots: A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain & Ireland*, "more progressive attitudes and expectations in the 19th century led to better legislation and medical practices, institutional asylums rather than private and a new class of health professional, the 'alienist' or psychiatrist, who attempted to understand mental afflictions," which was done through the new 'moral' treatment (Howe). However, the type of understanding of mental illness we have nowadays was still in its earliest stages and in most of the nineteenth century, "there was no distinction between those who were suffering from mental illness such as schizophrenia and those who were mentally disabled or had learning difficulties until the 1886 Idiots Act which enabled the building of "idiots asylums" or "mental deficiency colonies"" ("19th Century Mental Health"). This development in attitude towards the mentally ill only occurred mainly near the end of the nineteenth century, and such developments often take time to change society's view on such subjects. It is therefore no surprise that despite Furnivall's initial sympathy for Hoccleve, he also strongly criticizes him as a person.

Hoccleve's reputation as a poet is fairly negative, as a result of his own words as well as others' words. As previously mentioned by Burrow, Hoccleve claimed to think little of himself and the nineteenth-century Furnivall, despite living in the midst of significant social changes regarding mental illness, equally considered Hoccleve to have strong personal flaws. However, despite Furnivall's conviction that Hoccleve was a 'weak' poet and person, a different light has been shed on Hoccleve and his description of himself in our time. Critten brings up the possibility that Hoccleve may have presented himself in such a manner and as a person with depression on purpose, as "an innovative if particularly desperate (and ultimately misguided) manifestation of the post-Chaucerian humility topos" (Critten 405). This topos essentially means that a person uses a rhetorical strategy in order to make his or her opponent underestimate their intelligence (Wheeler). Critten thus questions how serious the reader

should take Hoccleve's claims to mental illness. However, the analysis in this thesis has shown that we have good reason to believe Hoccleve when he describes his personal experiences with depression and the consequences he encountered in society after his mental breakdown, even if these consequences are merely his interpretation of the world around him.

Furthermore, Hoccleve's belief that his depression is related to sin should also not be dismissed so easily, because this could be seen as a type of coping mechanism that is found in our time as well. Turner links this medieval belief of mental illness being caused by sin to the modern approach to illness, because "contemporary ideologies make illness less terrifying for the well by making it seem less random, by giving it meaning and making it part of a life narrative" (Turner 63). Even nowadays, people still look for reasons and controllable causes behind mental and physical illnesses. This tendency to try and find causes on which a person can exert some influence, for example by changing their lifestyle, is also found in medieval times. However, since religion had such a profound influence on people's lives back then, any causes for illnesses were seen through this religious framework. An example of such a cause placed in a religious framework would be the belief that a sinful life causes mental illness such as the depression from which Hoccleve suffers. The society in which Hoccleve lived and the beliefs they held onto thus played a crucial role in his view of the world and his perception and depiction of his depression.

Thomas Hoccleve's *Series,* in particular *My Compleinte* and the *Dialogue with a Friend,* point to Hoccleve's return to a mental illness he claims to have experienced before. In spite of his continuous claims that he is doing well, his way of focusing on his appearance and his unwaveringly negative assumptions about how others perceive him illuminate his irrational state of mind. This perception of the world as well as his conclusion that the cause of his mental illness lies in God's will illustrates the influence that religion had in the culture in which he lived. In Hoccleve's time, mental illness was considered a tangible thing, visible

in people's appearance and actions. Furthermore, mental illness was seen as being directly linked to sin and religion. Publications on such illnesses may have put Hoccleve's reputation and even his freedom at risk, yet society showed fairly little interest in the personal accounts found in his *Series*, instead only focusing on what was relevant to them. Societal expectations of how mental illness manifested and the cultural context in which Hoccleve lived thus strongly influenced how he chose to depict his experiences with depression.

Chapter 3

Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*

Christopher Smart (1722-1771) was an eighteenth-century English poet. Born in Kent, he was the son of Peter Smart and the Welsh Winnifred Smart. According to W.H. Bond, Peter Smart "was steward of the estates of William, Viscount Vane" and his son Christopher "was treated virtually as a member of the family by his father's patrons" (Bond 11). One of these patrons, the Duchess of Cleveland, even gave him money annually, which helped Smart through his time at the University and eventually delayed the negative effects of his lifestyle (Bond 11). Smart went to Pembroke College in Cambridge at the age of seventeen and became a very successful scholar, while he also became known for his poetry (Bond 11-12). His works won him the title of "Scholar of the University" in 1742, while he also came to be seen as the "University poet", even being elected "Fellow of Pembroke" in 1745 for his works and studies (Bond 12).

However, despite his achievements, Smart was also known for living an excessive lifestyle, which led to financially troubled times in 1746 (Bond 12). Although he was saved by both the University and his supporters and family, he did not change his lifestyle to suit his financial situation. Eventually, in spite of his brief reinstatement in 1748 at the University after having lost his position in 1747, he chose to go to London and become a writer for a living in 1749 (Bond 12). Here, he became quite a prolific writer and throughout the years, his religious poetry earned him the Seatonian Prize five times (Bond 12). However, he also began a relationship with Anna Maria Carnan, the step-daughter of his publisher John Newbery, marrying her in 1752 (Bond 12). This caused him to lose his connection to Pembroke because it was not a relationship that was approved of by his employer (Bond 13). Meanwhile, although Smart later became known most of all for his religious works, among which the *Jubilate Agno* (1759-1763) that will be discussed in this thesis, he did not limit himself to

religious works only. As Bond states: “His work cut across every shade of the literary spectrum; he was ready to try any variety of writing provided it promised some return” (13).

Despite the variety of his works, after the discovery of the *Jubilate Agno* in 1939, much scholarship has focused on two of the most crucial and recurring aspects of it: religion and language. Particularly in the 1960s, scholars such as John Block Friedman and Rebecca Price Parkin showed great interest in how Smart’s religion influenced his works. Friedman in his 1967 article “The Cosmology of Praise: Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*” explains that “it was Smart’s belief that God creates and sustains a cosmic harmony upon which the universe is contingent … and the poet’s duty is to serve as a kind of choir master leading the creation in an answering song” (250). The other scholar, Price Parkin, has highlighted not only the link between Smart’s poetic works and religion, but also the link within his work so often found between religion and animals. Price Parkin discusses Smart’s cat Jeoffry in particular in her 1969 article “Christopher Smart’s Sacramental Cat”. Later scholars have investigated other aspects of Smart’s works. For example, scholars such as Daniel J. Ennis have approached his works from a literary linguistic perspective, rather than a religious one. This specific focus on religion and language in Smart’s poetic works in the twentieth and twenty-first century will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

This focus in scholarship on religion and language is by no means unimportant, but it does tend to obscure the more personal nature of his poetry, particularly that found in the *Jubilate Agno*. The *Jubilate Agno* may be interpreted as a poem that depicts bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression. In this thesis, I will use Smart’s cultural context, conversion to Methodism, and personal situation to shed light on the representation of his mental illness in the *Jubilate Agno*. This work was written after Smart’s conversion to Methodism and the extremity with which he uses the beliefs of Methodism in this work is reminiscent of the religious delusions that Braam mentions are related to bipolar disorder. Furthermore, the

groups Smart chooses to include can be linked to those included in Methodism, namely the less privileged groups in society such as the poor. However, this choice to focus on marginalized groups seems to be heavily coloured by his own negative experiences, particularly with social isolation, suggesting that the *Jubilate Agno* may have been a very personal work to Smart which may have helped him cope with these experiences. Although it will never be certain to what extent the work may indeed have been written from his perspective, rather than from the perspective of a fictional narrator, I have chosen to consider the *Jubilate Agno* from Smart's personal perspective because of these references to his personal situation, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

In this thesis I will do a close-reading of only a small part of the total of the *Jubilate Agno*. This is partially because the length of the total poem by far exceeds that of Hoccleve's *Compleinte*, but a more important reason is highlighted by the issue Bond brings up. The *Jubilate Agno* is divided into two sections: the *Let* section and the *For* section. In the former, Smart applies his religious view more broadly, while in the latter his view is more often applied to his personal situation, something which rarely happens in the *Let* section. This distinction between the more general nature of the *Let* section and the more personal nature of the *For* section explains why scholars such as Bond tend to divide them. Furthermore, Bond explains that the text is divided into five fragments, but not all of them contain both of these sections. This could be because certain sections were lost, but they may never have been written at all. Bond also states that despite the physical separation of the *Let* and *For* sections, the content initially shows great overlap (18). However, when it comes to this content relating to one another, he also explains that "its decline and termination may be observed midway through Fragment B1" (Bond 22). Still, it is in this fragment that we find both Smart's personal experiences in the *For* section as well as his tendency to place them in the broader yet strongly religious context of the *Let* section. This is why this fragment has been chosen for

this thesis, though there are some references to other parts of the *Jubilate Agno*, such as the Jeoffry passage, which is in Fragment B2.

Cultural Context and Personal Background

Christopher Smart is known mainly as a religious poet and while this has been appreciated in more recent times, for example by Price Parkin and Friedman, in Smart's own day and age it was precisely his obsession with religion that caused him to be confined to St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics in 1757 and later to Mr. Potter's madhouse, both situated in London. This obsession started after he became severely ill in 1756. This was "an illness that combined a physical and an emotional crisis and produced a religious conversion" to Methodism (Rizzo and Mahony 56). Smart had suffered from such illness before, "but without the mental anguish interpreted by his family and friends as insanity" (Rizzo and Mahony 65). Samuel Johnson, one of Smart's friends, has commented on this period of illness, stating that he took over Smart's writing for *The Universal Visitor* for a while (Rizzo and Mahony 57). It is this remark that "locates the onset of Smart's mental illness as simultaneous with both the physical crisis and the conversion" (Rizzo and Mahony 57).

Smart's conversion to Methodism can be linked to the manic depression that may have been seen by his family and friends as insanity. Methodism was a movement within the Church of England in the eighteenth century. This movement, founded by John Wesley, initially attempted to reform the Church, but later it "became separate from its parent body and developed into an autonomous church," complete with their own views on religion and its own practices (Davies). As R.C. Tennant points out, Smart's religious conversion during and after his illness in 1756 followed "the pattern set by the contemporary Methodists and Moravians, who typically experienced first of all assent to God's providence and then, after a

period of waiting, received by grace a total and permanent rebirth in faith" (Tennant 63). Rupert E. Davies describes its teachings as follows:

> Methodism is marked by an acceptance of the doctrines of historical Christianity; by an emphasis on doctrines that indicate the power of the Holy Spirit to confirm the faith of believers and to transform their personal lives; by an insistence that the heart of religion lies in a personal relationship with God; by simplicity of worship; … by a concern for the underprivileged and the improvement of social conditions. (Davies)

While Smart's adherence to this religion in itself was not an issue, the extremity with which he immersed himself in the ideas and practices of Methodism would have been deemed abnormal by his contemporaries. Moreover, his behaviour and his highly religious views as depicted in the *Jubilate Agno* would nowadays be seen as potentially indicative of bipolar disorder.

Although Smart regained his health physically after his illness in 1756, his new dedication to God became extreme, particularly when he had been drinking. Max Nelson states that "when he'd been drinking he would fall victim to the fervid, dramatic praying fits that so alarmed his relatives and friends" (Nelson). This type of praying also led to an incident in St. James' Park, to which Smart himself refers in the *Jubilate Agno*: "For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed all the company. For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff" (Smart 55, lines 89-90). The first part of this line suggests that he must have attracted much attention. Smart also suggests that he suffered abuse at the hands of "the officers of the peace" as a result of his praying so openly. Since he calls them "the officers of the peace," he may have been aware that he was disturbing others with his behaviour.

This was not the first time that Smart prayed in such a manner in public. This kind of praying may be traced back to Methodism, since Davies explains that "Methodist worship everywhere is partly liturgical and partly spontaneous" and that John Wesley "conducted services that included extemporaneous prayer" (Davies). However, there is no evidence to suggest that Smart took part in any services. Instead, it appears that he abruptly began praying on his own and thus may have disturbed others because they saw no cause for his praying and saw this as abnormal behaviour. Smart's confinement was thus not necessarily because he was a danger to society, but because he was likely seen as a public nuisance. However, there has been some debate about whether it was this public praying that caused his arrest, or if his confinement was the result of social conflicts.

One such conflict may have been rooted in his lifestyle and the impact it had on his family. As previously mentioned, he had married Anna Maria Carnan. However, as Zachary Sitter states, "Smart's improvident habits and meager income seem to have undermined whatever stability family life might have promised" and this caused the eventual estrangement between Anna Maria and Christopher Smart (Sitter 24). Furthermore, whenever Smart's income did not allow him to continue this lavish lifestyle, he chose to borrow money from Newbery, which caused Smart to owe Newbery more and more money despite his inability to pay it back ("Christopher Smart"). Since Smart's habits had an impact on Newbery and his stepdaughter, Newbery might have used Smart's conversion and the public praying as an excuse to have him confined in order to protect himself, his stepdaughter and her two daughters.

Smart was confined to St. Luke's from 1757 until 1758, after which he spent "possibly part of the time at home," though it is likely that he was confined to Mr. Potter's madhouse in Bethnal Green during the following years until his release in 1763 ("Christopher Smart"). As I will discuss in more detail later in this thesis, various references in the *Jubilate Agno* to the

circumstances in these institutions show how Smart strongly resented his confinement and how he believed he did not belong in a mental institution in the first place. However, although not much further information is available on how he was treated during his confinement, Allan Ingram suggests that Smart's confinement in at least the second place was likely not as bad as Smart claims: "His confinement within Mr Potter's madhouse in Bethnal Green, while regretted and resented by Smart, was apparently neither brutal nor restrictive … As it was, he was left relatively unhampered to deal as he thought fit with the scope of his own madness" (Ingram). Again, though Smart's poem clearly shows signs of resentment, he also writes the following: "For I bless God that I am not in a dungeon, but am allowed the light of the Sun" (Smart 65, line 147).

Smart began writing the *Jubilate Agno* probably in 1759, two years after he had been confined. The *Jubilate Agno* testifies to his extreme religiousness. However, aside from being an overtly religious work, the *Jubilate Agno* contains a surprisingly direct statement regarding Smart's experiences with his mental illness. Smart states in the *Jubilate Agno* that he has "a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another" (Smart 63, line 132). This particular line shows us that Smart was indeed aware that he suffered from mental illness and this description in line 132 clearly suits Belmaker's definition of bipolar disorder as consisting of both manic and depressive episodes, as mentioned in the introduction. While this comment certainly suggests Smart suffered from this disorder, there is another symptom that permeates the *Jubilate Agno*.

Smart's obsession with religion could be considered as indicative of bipolar disorder. As I have previously discussed in the introduction, Braam claims that in our time, a sudden increase in religiousness would arouse doctors' suspicions that a patient may be having a manic episode. Furthermore, Braam has also shown how this obsession with religion not only affects a person during a manic episode, but that it affects the person when coming out of

such an episode as well. This is because the person will feel a sense of loss and this loss, added to a renewed awareness of the mental illness, may cause a person to end up in a cycle, going from depression to mania again and again (Braam 106). Considering this relationship between religiousness and bipolar disorder, and the fact that Smart's mental illness and conversion coincided, the focus he puts on religion in the *Jubilate Agno* may be seen as sign of a manic episode and thus indicative of bipolar disorder. Furthermore, Smart wrote the *Jubilate Agno* over the course of several years. This could suggest that he continued writing this poem during manic episodes.

Of course, the link Braam makes between religion and bipolar disorder is a modern perspective on the illness and it is important to be aware that religion does not have the same place in current society as it had in previous centuries. In Hoccleve's time, it still had a very strong influence on how people viewed the world and how they perceived mental illness. As we have seen, Hoccleve searched for the cause of his mental illness in religion, a reaction that came naturally to him because of the nature of the society he lived in. However, by the time Smart wrote the *Jubilate Agno*, society and its way of thinking had undergone significant changes. Religion no longer had the strong influence it did before and instead, people had begun leaning towards more scientific and rational explanations of many phenomena. For example, the belief that mental illness had a religious cause, such as it being a punishment for sin, had faded significantly as compared to Hoccleve's time. This change in society's way of thinking was the result of the Enlightenment.

Brian Duignan explains that the Enlightenment was a "European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries" (Duignan). This movement changed the way people thought about "ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and humanity" (Duignan). The new worldview that resulted from these changing ideas greatly affected several different fields. Duignan focuses on the "revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics"

(Duignan). Most importantly, the Enlightenment was characterized by "the use and celebration of reason" (Duignan). Reason, rather than religion, was now the main influence on the way people thought. The field of science witnessed great developments and this caused people to reconsider many of the ideas once so prevalent in society, such as the ideas of classical scholars as Aristotle (Needham). Religion now saw new developments too, despite its loss of influence on society. An example is the previously discussed Methodism. However, though there may have been at least two different views on Smart's behaviour, it was precisely the upcoming of the Enlightenment that resulted in a growing number of people who began to question the traditions and ideas of the Church and movements like Methodism. A more rational approach thus slowly became the norm.

This shift from a religious to a more reasonable and scientific perspective on the world explains why Smart's praying in St. James's Park caused him to be considered a public nuisance, even when it did fit into the doctrines of Methodism, and why his obsession with religion was seen as unacceptable. Although religion was still developing and branching out into new movements, these no longer had the strong force they would have had in Hoccleve's time. This is because attitudes towards religious movements were changing as the rational approach became the norm. Some of the ideas and practices of movements like Methodism did not fit in with this new approach. For example, spontaneous prayer has previously been mentioned to be characteristic of the Methodist way of worshiping God. However, such spontaneous practices did not match the increasingly rational view on the world because they seem to have been based much more on emotion than on reason.

The religious practices that did not fit in with the new way of thinking may have led people to be averse to those who adhered to this movement. Smart likely experienced this aversion first-hand when his obsession with Methodism was deemed abnormal enough in this new Age of Reason to warrant confinement for religious mania. In the eyes of society, this

confinement may well have seemed the right decision, because Smart would unlikely have been able to justify his behaviour and his level of immersion in Methodism through the rational means that society searched for. For example, they may have desired tangible proof of the influence Smart believed God to have, proof which Smart would not have been able to provide. The choice to have Smart confined may well have been made to make him conform to these relatively new norms in society, ones based on reason. Yet in spite of his confinement to St Luke's and later to Mr Potter's, his religious mania did not abate and continued during his writing of the *Jubilate Agno*.

The *Jubilate Agno*

The *Jubilate Agno* is indeed heavily influenced by Smart's extremely religious views and ultimately by his mental illness. Braam discussed how religious mania is a symptom of bipolar disorder and it is this mania which greatly influenced the way Smart chose to depict himself, his personal situation, and the world in the *Jubilate Agno.* Smart depicts himself as a protector of his faith and as a person willing to take great risks for his beliefs. He also utilizes his religious mania to point to his personal experiences with social isolation, which he places in a highly religious context. Furthermore, he proceeds to use his personal experiences with social isolation to point to a greater issue in society, namely marginalized groups. Because of his mental illness, Smart became part of a marginalized group and experienced what being a part of it entailed. His mental illness is thus represented as an issue that greatly affected his view on himself and on the world, as well as his personal situation and his attitude towards marginalized groups.

Smart depicts himself as having a crucial role in relation to God, to which he refers various times in Fragment B1. Friedman claims that Smart was "a kind of choir master

leading the creation" (250). However, when looking at the various lines in which Smart refers to himself in relation to God, he seems to be more of a protector of his faith, a person who is willing to take great risks to support God. The following lines illustrate these risks:

> For I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I had the grace to obey the voice of Christ in my conscience.
>
> For I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I was willing to run all hazards for the sake of the name of the Lord.
>
> For I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I was willing to be called a fool for the sake of Christ. (Smart 49, lines 49-51)

While these lines could indeed be linked to Methodism, the lines may also be interpreted as indicative of bipolar disorder, particularly of a manic episode. As previously discussed, Belmaker explains that a manic episode is characterized by "an increased optimism that usually becomes so extreme that the patient's judgment is impaired" (476). Such a sense of extreme optimism may also be connected to the increased religiousness that Braam mentions as symptomatic of a manic episode, since Smart believed God would save him. This connection will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis. However, I will now take a closer look at lines 49-51. These can be traced back to Smart's personal background and to a particular event in his life, namely his excessive praying in St. James' Park. More generally, the impact this event had on Smart's life is an example of the kind of consequences a person with bipolar disorder may experience when they take extreme risks.

When reading line 49, it becomes clear that Smart's religion strongly influenced his work, because this line refers to the idea in Methodism that the believer would have a personal relationship with God. Lines 50 and 51, however, are much more focused on the type of risk-taking that could be suggestive of a manic episode. In line 50, for example, Smart states that he would "run all hazards for the sake of the name of the Lord", which suggests

that he does not care about the possible consequences for his health and well-being. He does not clarify what these hazards may be in great detail, other than the social hazard of being "called a fool", but it does set the tone for the following lines, which imply that he disregards any negative consequences in order to hold onto his faith. In the following line, where he states he "was willing to be called a fool for the sake of Christ", an example is given of such a consequence. This line illustrates that he disregards being treated like a "madman", in this case somebody who displays abnormal behaviour for his religious beliefs, as wholly unimportant and, as will be discussed in more detail later on, even considers it to be inaccurate. Since lines 49-51 all refer to "the thirteenth of August", it could easily be considered that Smart may be referring to a single event in his life in which he indeed experienced negative consequences due to his extreme immersion in Methodism. As such, lines 49 to 51 may be considered to refer to the event of his loud praying in St. James's Park, where he experienced a social backlash for his behaviour which must have left a deep impression on him since he refers to it various times throughout the *Jubilate Agno*.

This social backlash Smart received for his behaviour and the confinement that followed could be seen as examples of negative consequences experienced by someone who suffered from manic depression. Smart's behaviour in St. James's Park may have been the result of the impaired judgment that, as I have discussed earlier, is a sign of manic depression. Despite these negative consequences that Smart experienced due to the risk he took for his faith, Smart's religious mania did not change during his confinement. In fact, the *Jubilate Agno* demonstrates in what ways Smart disagreed with and resented his confinement. For example, he did not agree with being seen as a "lunatic", since he claims that "Silly fellow! Silly fellow! Is against me and belongeth neither to me nor my family" (Smart 51, line 60). This line illustrates that he could not find himself in others' assumptions that he was suffering from a mental illness and that he found his confinement unjustified.

Furthermore, Smart depicts the circumstances in which he has found himself due to his behaviour as unpleasant. For example, he describes how people with mental illness who were confined to a mental institution were still seen as a spectacle: "For they pass by me in their tour, and the good Samaritan is not yet come" (Smart 51, line 63). This suggests that Smart was perhaps displayed just as they did in the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Hoccleve's time, as a form of entertainment for the public. His mention of the "good Samaritan" shows that he hopes for someone to save him from such treatment. Smart also hints at potential abuse of the inmates in order to correct their behaviour: "For they work me with their harping irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others" (Smart 61, line 124). As previously mentioned, Ingram has suggested that his confinement was not actually as bad as Smart claims.

However, it does not matter whether or not Smart truly experienced or perhaps witnessed these circumstances. The fact that he claims his actions had extreme consequences demonstrates how the risks taken during a manic episode could have a severe impact on a person's life. Smart suggests that his behaviour damaged his social reputation. It also led to his confinement. His descriptions of being called a "silly fellow" and of the unpleasant circumstances thus provide the reader with examples of the kind of negative consequences that may be experienced by a person whose judgment is impaired, for example due to manic depression. Yet despite his experiences, Smart does not waver in his religious beliefs as exemplified by the *Jubilate Agno*, which is reminiscent of the distorted perception of reality that Hoccleve also described in his *Compleinte*. Rather than facing reality as it is, he chooses to depict it from a highly religious perspective. Smart may have even found it useful to do so in order to cope with his confinement, thus describing these consequences as the "hazards" he endures for Christ. It could have been a way for him to give his experiences meaning. However, it is these "hazards" described in the *Jubilate Agno* that make the poem a kind of

cautionary tale. This work provides the reader with examples of what may happen to a person who is unable to correctly estimate the potential consequences of their actions, for example a person with bipolar disorder.

The most extreme risk that Smart refers to in the *Jubilate Agno* is his readiness to die. Line 98 shows that his religious mania influences the value he ascribes to his own life: "For I am ready to die for his sake – who lay down his life for all mankind" (Smart 57, line 98). Though those adhering to Methodism may have celebrated this kind of commitment, it seems unlikely that many would actually risk injury or even their life for their faith. However, if Smart suffered from manic depression, it should not be forgotten that those experiencing a manic episode often tend to take risks that could even be harmful. The value he ascribes to his life in the *Jubilate Agno* appears to be very low and this could be seen as an example of a distorted perspective of reality. As such, it should be considered that Smart may have actually meant what he said and would in fact be willing to die for his God, regardless of the consequences.

This willingness to die for God can also be taken not just as an example of a distorted reality in general, but more specifically as an example of his religious delusions. This line is particularly remarkable because it is reminiscent of Christ's death for mankind. Just as Christ died for mankind, so Smart would die for God in return. Smart's religious mania is thus described in line 98 of the poem. Not only would he risk everything for God; in a way, he places himself in the position of Christ. Another line that shows that Smart depicted himself as being in Christ's position in the *Jubilate Agno* is line 94: "For the Lord is my ROCK and I am the bearer of his CROSS" (Smart 57, line 94). Here, too, the link is made between his personal relation to God and the death of Christ on the cross.

Yet although he shows that he would die for the Lord, he equally believes that Christ would save him from the struggles he goes through: "For I am in twelve HARDSHIPS, but he

that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all" (Smart 63, line 139). He depicts himself as willing to risk his life because God has the power to save him from the consequences and from the miserable circumstances, or the "twelve HARDSHIPS", that he already finds himself in. This faith in God's ability to save someone from death could be considered a typical Christian belief. However, it is also reminiscent of the extreme optimism and religious delusions that could be seen as symptoms of a manic episode. If line 139 is considered from the perspective of a person with bipolar disorder, this view of God as depicted by Smart would provide a person with a false sense of safety. This may lead a person suffering from bipolar disorder to take risks that could be detrimental to one's health, even if they believe they are doing so for a good cause.

The *Jubilate Agno* is influenced strongly by Smart's religious beliefs, which may have become extreme due to his mental illness. It has been discussed how Smart's extremely religious view on the world may have caused a social backlash, which may have resulted in his confinement. Furthermore, Smart's claim that he is willing to die for God may initially appear to be the result of more general religious beliefs. However, if it is kept in mind that he may have suffered from bipolar disorder, this claim could also be seen as indicative of the extreme optimism that could come with a manic episode. If the *Jubilate Agno* is considered to have been written from the perspective of somebody suffering from bipolar disorder, it presents the reader with a distorted perception of reality. This is something that Hoccleve's works and Smart's poem have in common. Hoccleve viewed the world from a negative perspective and believed the world was against him, while Smart depicts everything he sees and knows as being connected to God.

Smart's choice to depict God as the ultimate factor that connects everything in the world may have been the result of Smart's mental illness. This way of depicting God could point to the religious delusions mentioned by Braam. However, when looking at the *Jubilate*

Agno with these experiences in mind, the poem is not merely an attempt to find coherence in existence in general. This work could be considered as Smart's attempt to find his own place in the world. He views God as the one connecting factor, the one thing he has in common with everything else. In this way, he includes himself once again in the world. While Smart's mental illness could indeed have led to this way of depicting God, this depiction could also have been the result of the social isolation and exclusion Smart experienced during his confinement.

The prominent place of animals in Smart's work further reflects his social isolation. One animal in particular, connected more to Smart personally than to religion or God, is given a role of great significance in the *Jubilate Agno*. This animal, discussed at length in the *Jubilate Agno*, is his cat Jeoffry, described in Fragment B2, lines 697-770, all of which are from the *For* section since there is no *Let* section for this part. Here, too, we find the recurrent tendency of Smart to consider everything in a religious light. Some examples of his religious depiction of his cat are the first lines of this part of the *Jubilate Agno*:

> For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.
> For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him.
> For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.
> For is this done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
> For then he leaps up to catch the musk, w^{ch} is the blessing of God upon his prayer (Smart 115-6, lines 697-701).

This passage about his cat Jeoffry is one of the most well-known and well-studied parts of the *Jubilate Agno*. Price Parkin, for example, has shown how Jeoffry is depicted as a creature that prays in his own way, providing a good example for mankind to follow. Smart indeed elaborately describes the actions of his cat, which he has a chance to observe since "at least from 1759 he had access to newspapers and books and was allowed to keep a cat"

("Christopher Smart"). He considers Jeoffry to be a crucial part of the grander scheme in which all is connected through the Lord. Once again, this demonstrates the importance of religion for Smart. More importantly, however, is that this particular passage illustrates how his personal life influenced his *Jubilate Agno*.

His description of Jeoffry may have been a way to cope with depression and loneliness, because the cat could have been one of the few links to the outside world Smart had. While the cat's presence would have provided Smart with a concrete example to discuss in the *Jubilate Agno* of how the divine can be found in the smallest of creatures, he may have also chosen to depict Jeoffry in a religious way to create a certain personal connection to another living creature while he was socially isolated. This connection would have been through their shared link to God. Just as Smart prayed to God, so did Jeoffry pray to the same God, though he does so in his own way. In depicting Jeoffry as having something in common with himself, Smart may be trying to suggest that everything has a place in the world and in doing so, he may be trying to find his own place within this grander scheme and within society itself. This attempt to find a connection, particularly to other living creatures, is not confined to Jeoffry. However, it is the cat who is most elaborately described and it is also the one living creature Smart would have encountered the most. This may be seen as the most profound and certainly the most well-known passage in which Smart includes groups that can be traced back to his personal life and struggles.

However, though animals are referred to many times, Smart's focus is still on people. A tendency that can be found in the *Jubilate Agno* is the focus on various groups that could be considered underprivileged, such as the poor, the blind, and even Smart's fellow inmates. Smart's choices of which groups to include and exclude may to some extent have been influenced by his immersion in Methodism. Methodism, as explained by Davies, is marked "by a concern for the underprivileged and the improvement of social conditions" (Davies).

The main reason that this would attract Smart's attention is because he may have considered himself to be part of such an underprivileged group once he was confined, and particularly when he became socially isolated. I want to argue that Smart's personal experiences with social isolation, partially caused by the estrangement from his wife, led to his focus on the underprivileged. I will discuss how this estrangement from his wife affected Smart and how this is reflected in the *Jubilate Agno* through the reference to the Biblical figure of Mary Magdalen. Furthermore, due to the scope of this thesis, I will limit my discussion of the underprivileged groups to which Smart refers to the one group that shows the most obvious personal link to Smart: his fellow inmates, whose struggles he may have been able to observe closely and even experience himself, such as the social isolation and exclusion from society. His references to his fellow inmates illustrate how Smart not only focused on how his personal situation affected him, but that he chose to utilize his experiences to point towards greater social issues.

References to Biblical characters make up a significant part of the *Jubilate Agno.* Many of these figures are perhaps fairly unknown to our current society and may have already been somewhat obscure to Smart's contemporaries, since he had a relatively extensive knowledge of the Biblical stories. However, more well-known Biblical characters are also referred to and one of these in particular may be traced back to Smart's personal situation regarding his family life. Smart refers to Mary Magdalen in line 155: "Let Mary Magdalen rejoice with the Place, whose goodness & purity are of the Lord's making" (Smart 66, line 155). Mary Magdalen is well-known, even nowadays, and she can be directly linked to the event of Jesus dying on the cross. This event clearly made a great impression on Smart, who refers to the cross in relation to himself too, as has been previously discussed. According to James Carroll, Mary Magdalen played a key role in Jesus' life and death, because she "was one of the women who stayed with him, even to the Crucifixion" (Carroll). Mary was also

"the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection and the first to preach the "Good News" of that miracle" (Carroll). She was thus an influential figure in the Bible.

As Carroll's description of Mary Magdalen's loyalty to Jesus suggests, Smart's choice to include her may have been because he admired this particular trait in her. He could have included Mary Magdalen as an example of the true loyalty and support he felt he was not given by his family, particularly by his wife. Very early on in the *Jubilate Agno,* Smart already mentions "family bickerings and domestic jars," (Smart 41, line 7). This suggests that Smart and his wife were already struggling in their relationship even before his confinement. These struggles may well have been regarding Smart's extravagant lifestyle. For example, it is said that "according to his wife he often invited company to dinner when there was not enough in the house to provide a meal even for themselves" ("Christopher Smart"). Smart's choices before his confinement thus had a negative effect on Anna Maria and her children and when he was confined, he would no longer have been able to provide for his family at all.

Smart's stay at St. Luke's and Mr. Potter's in the period of 1757 until 1763 changed his relationship with his wife greatly, resulting in his wife leaving him. The separation between the two of them is described as follows:

> By this time Anna Maria Smart had moved with her two daughters to Dublin, where she opened a shop. She returned after two years and settled in Reading, where she ran a newspaper for her stepfather, but she seems to have made no attempt to visit her husband throughout the last ten years of his life. ("Christopher Smart")

Considering this personal background, Smart must have felt abandoned by his family since his wife moved away from where he was confined and likely cut ties with him completely. This change in his personal situation is reflected by the *Jubilate Agno*. Initially, Smart claims that "they have seperated me and my bosom, whereas the right comes by setting us together"

(Smart 51, line 59). However, his attitude has clearly changed by line 104: “For beauty is better to look upon than to meddle with and tis good for a man not to know a woman” (Smart 57, line 104). He may have initially kept the hope that Anna Maria would return, but eventually came to realize that she had begun her own life without him. This might have led him to become bitter and distrustful of women in general because he felt scorned by her actions. Though her reasons to leave may have been just, considering they negatively affected her and her children, Smart could have felt abandoned by his family in a time when he needed support the most. As such, loyalty could have become an issue that affected his state of mind and his social relationships. This may have led him to include Mary since she was his ideal image of loyalty. Including her while generally excluding women, as he does in line 104, may thus have been a sneer at his wife.

During the confinement that inevitably played a part in this estrangement from his wife, Smart would have come into contact with his fellow inmates at St. Luke’s and Mr. Potter’s. Smart may have learnt to see what he had in common with this marginalized group, but he also came to see them as individuals. This is reflected by his references to the inmates both in more general and more specific terms in the *Jubilate Agno*. For example, line 123 refers to all of his fellow inmates in the mental institutions: “For I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all my brethren and sisters in these houses” (Smart 61, line 123). Line 123 is strange, since it has been discussed earlier that he resented his confinement. He refused to be seen as a “silly fellow”, or as somebody who suffered from mental illness. Yet he speaks of those who were also inmates as “brethren and sisters”, suggesting that he considered them to have something in common with him. Likely the only thing that could have connected them was the confinement for mental illness. This may mean that Smart was indeed aware that he was part of this group too, and that he may thus have been aware of his mental illness.

More important, however, is the fact that this group was confined to a mental institution and thus may have suffered the consequences of social isolation due to the exclusion from society. Smart experienced this isolation to some extent as well. As previously mentioned, his wife chose to leave with their daughters, which meant that Smart lost several of the most important social contacts he had and therefore the most crucial links to the rest of society. Instead, he found himself to be part of the group of inmates at these institutions. However, this group was often not understood by society. Being part of this group also meant that they were no longer seen as individuals, but rather a general group that could not be trusted because of their mental illness. Smart, too, may have felt that he had become no more to society than part of a marginalized group, stripped of any individual characteristics. The forced social isolation from the rest of society that followed thus may have caused Smart to feel a connection to the inmates.

While society may have failed to see the individuals behind the mental illness, it was precisely this distinction that Smart learnt to make because he would have developed a different, more humane view of his fellow inmates. During his confinement, Smart would have had the chance to observe and come into contact with these inmates and he may have come to the realization that they were more than their illness. His newly gained perspective on the inmates as individuals rather than a collective marginalized group is reflected in the *Jubilate Agno*. Smart does not seem to feel the need to describe these inmates and chooses to simply name some of them. An example is his reference to John Dore in line 141: "Let Mark rejoice with the Mullet, who is John Dore, God be gracious to him & his family" (Smart 64, line 141). There seems to be no judgment in this line or other lines like it, nor does he label them, only naming them as individuals. Ennis has noted that "for Smart, to name something – to speak its *word* – is not to label, but to call forth" (Ennis 10).

His references to these inmates suggest that he wanted more visibility for a group that was locked away from, dehumanized and excluded by the rest of society. He identifies with this group because he shared their experiences and had clearly come to understand their struggles within society. One of the most devastating struggles would have been the social exclusion they often faced, which in the case of the inmates resulted in their confinement to mental institutions. In naming these inmates not just as a collective group, but as individuals, Smart points to greater social issues, such as the mistreatment of those that are part of a marginalized group. This is not limited just to his personal experiences either, because he refers to other groups that face similar issues too.

In the *Jubilate Agno*, he refers to several other groups that would have dealt with social exclusion in different ways. Smart's choices of which groups to include may have been influenced both by his personal experiences as inmate of a mental institution and by his immersion in Methodism, which is marked "by a concern for the underprivileged and the improvement of social conditions" (Davies). Considering Smart's personal background with mental illness and the confinement that followed, he would certainly have considered himself to be part of a marginalized group, but instead of focusing fully on this group, he looks beyond it towards other groups that would benefit from more visibility and understanding. For example, Smart has made references to the poor and to people with physical disabilities, such as the blind, showing that he used his own experiences to point to greater social issues regarding marginalized groups, even if social exclusion was the only common ground between him and the group.

The *Jubilate Agno* is a fascinating poem. It testifies to Smart's bipolar disorder, mainly because of the many religious references he makes in relation to the rest of the world. Smart tries to connect many different aspects in the world through God, yet this type of religious view was no longer dominant in his society the way it was in Hoccleve's time.

Hoccleve was able to find the cause for his mental illness in his religion, as he does in *My Compleinte*, because his culture was strongly influenced by such beliefs to begin with. By the time Smart wrote the *Jubilate Agno*, religion had lost much of its previous influence. Smart's immersion in Methodism was thus deemed abnormal and may have led to his confinement to a mental institution. Despite the struggles he faced in his life, when the *Jubilate Agno* is compared with Hoccleve's *My Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend*, Smart actually rarely refers to his personal experiences directly. Hoccleve's poetry is written from a highly personal perspective and deals directly with his experiences with depression. Smart's poetry, on the other hand, testifies for the greater part indirectly to his mental illness. The way he utilizes his religion is an example. Despite these differences in the depiction of their mental illness, both Hoccleve and Smart try to find their place in a society that rejects them and seem to find comfort in their religion. Hoccleve discusses how others seem to distrust him and he finds comfort in becoming a worshiper of God, while Smart finds himself to be a part of a marginalized group and chooses to use his experiences to bring attention to greater social issues, such as the way marginalized groups are treated by society, in a religious poem. However, the *Jubilate Agno* was not read until the twentieth century.

Chapter 4

The Publication of the *Jubilate Agno*

Although the *Jubilate Agno* would have provided valuable insight for his contemporaries in Smart's personal experiences, especially regarding his mental illness and the ways he tried to deal with it, they never actually read any part of this work. As Ennis states, "Smart's *ars poetica* lay undiscovered, in manuscript, until the twentieth century" (Ennis 21). More specifically, it was William Force Stead who published it in 1939 "under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb*, as a linear text with *Let* and *For* verses printed in successive blocks" ("Christopher Smart"). This publication caused much confusion among the audience and "it was understandably regarded mainly as a fascinating curiosity, at best the incoherent outpourings of a mad genius, although showing remarkable gifts of observation and expression and flashes of spiritual insight" ("Christopher Smart"). Smart would likely have received similar reactions if he had published it himself. Indeed, his other works, made in the last years of his life, were regarded by the general public with a critical eye. For example, Bond explains how *A Song to David*, which Smart published in 1763, was not received favourably. He states that while there were readers who could appreciate some of the work, others considered this work proof that Smart was still mentally ill and his readers continued looking for signs of this illness (Bond 15).

The *Jubilate Agno*, written around the same time as *A Song to David*, was never meant to be published despite the fact that "the lengthy manuscript of *Jubilate Agno*, the surviving fragments of which, amounting to more than 1,700 verses, represent only about a third of what he actually wrote" ("Christopher Smart"). Apart from the issue of the *Let* and *For* sections, which often miss the other section and the initial overlap, Bond points out that Smart only revised a few parts of it (Bond 17). Bond notes that "a few revisions and insertions do appear sporadically … but there are many points exhibiting defects which the most careless

author should have corrected in reviewing his work" (Bond 17). Since the work was found in the manuscript in this state, it is unlikely that Smart ever published any part of it. Yet based on the reception of his later works, this work would most likely not have been received favourably among his contemporaries and might even have added to his already problematic reputation of being a 'mad poet'.

As previously mentioned, when the *Jubilate Agno* was eventually published in the twentieth century, many readers perceived the work much like Smart's contemporaries would have. However, by this time, there was more openness towards works like the *Jubilate Agno* and several scholars did show interest in it, particularly regarding the aspects of religion and language. In this thesis, Friedman and Price Parkin have already been briefly mentioned. According to Friedman, Smart saw the divine in the smallest things and considered God to be the creator of mankind, animals, plants and even minerals. Smart thus considered the universe to be a coherent thing in which everything has one common factor: they were all created by God. Price Parkin chooses to focus on his cat Jeoffry, who is the subject of one of the most well-known passages in the *Jubilate Agno*. Price Parkin claims that "Jeoffry helps put man in his place," simply by doing what a cat does (1194). She attributes many Christian ideals to the way Smart describes Jeoffry, such as "humility and charity" and "Christian forgiveness" (Price Parkin 1194-5). Both of these scholars wrote in the 1960s, when the main focus seemed to have been on the religious aspects of Smart's work.

This focus of scholarship on Christianity in poetry can be explained by looking at two significant cultural changes happening in the 1960s. The first change is found in the field of literary theory. The idea of what was and was not considered literature changed and literary theory gained new significance. One reason for this is discussed by Terry Eagleton. He states that before the 1960s, literature was seen as something that could "only be appreciated by those with a particular sort of cultural breeding" (Eagleton viii). However, during this period

this assumption was undermined by "new kinds of students entering higher education from supposedly 'uncultivated' backgrounds" (Eagleton viii). These new students were inevitably influenced by their personal concerns and thus brought new perspectives into the previously elitist literary field. This led to a reconsideration of what literature really was, since a new range of topics became relevant because of these new scholars who had much more varied backgrounds than before.

One such topic that was reconsidered regarding literature was religion. The matter of whether religious works should also be considered from a literary perspective rather than a purely theological one was especially relevant since the Church was rapidly losing its influence on society. Hugh McLeod describes the 1960s as "a period of decisive change in the religious history of the Western world" (205). Some of the changes he describes are: "a decline in church membership and attendance, and a drop in the number of clergy and other religious professionals"; "a weakening of the processes by which Christian identity and knowledge of Christianity had been passed on to the younger generation"; and "a great multiplication of the world-views accessible to those in their formative years" (McLeod 205-206). Although an elaborate discussion of these changes is not relevant to this thesis, they do explain why the main focus in the 1960s was on religion and why a religious poet such as Smart would suddenly receive more attention.

By 2000 this focus in scholarship had shifted from a religious to a literary linguistic perspective. This may partially be explained by the aforementioned loss of influence of the church, which may have led to a focus on other fields related to literature. One such field that could be connected directly to one of Smart's personal interests is linguistics. Although Smart was certainly known as a religious poet, he also showed an interest in translation. For example, he wrote the following line in the *Jubilate Agno*: "For I pray the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it" (Smart 47, line 43). Moreover, Ennis

points out that Smart also translated works of others, such as that of the English poet Alexander Pope when this poet became ill and wished his works to be translated into Latin (Ennis 3-4). Since Smart had an interest in the more linguistic side of literature as well, modern scholars are able to investigate to what extent this interest influenced how Smart constructed his poetry. However, when it comes to the way he wrote the *Jubilate Agno*, his religious view in combination with his mental illness still seem to have been the greatest influence.

Unlike Hoccleve, Smart never actually published his *Jubilate Agno*, a poetic work suggestive of bipolar disorder. Although Smart never had to face any consequences in society for this work, the negative reaction *A Song to David* received from his contemporaries suggests that the *Jubilate Agno* would not likely have been received favourably either. In fact, it is the exact fear that Hoccleve speaks of in his *Dialogue*, over three hundred years before Smart was even born, that seems to have come true for Smart. In Hoccleve's *Dialogue with a Friend*, he discusses how the publication of *My Compleinte* may lead others to question his mental health and regard him with suspicion because he already had past experiences with depression. While Hoccleve himself does not seem to have suffered from the publication of these works, Smart's confinement and insistence to continue his immersion in religion seems to have damaged his reputation to the point where his contemporaries viewed any work he published afterwards with extreme suspicion. Though later scholars could appreciate at least part of the *Jubilate Agno*, in his time Smart experienced the most negative consequence of publishing works as a person known to have been confined from mental illness: social exclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to compare two representations of depression from two distinct periods. These depictions of depression in poetry show similarities over time, while also demonstrating how such depictions may differ greatly depending on several factors. The factors I have chosen to investigate in this thesis are the poet's type of depression, their cultural and personal backgrounds, and the degree to which they choose to focus on their personal perspective and experiences. The works of Thomas Hoccleve, a fourteenth-century poet, and Christopher Smart, an eighteenth-century poet, have both been investigated to see to what extent these depictions of depression differ and in what ways they show similarities. This investigation has shown how the experience with depression itself may show similarities, such as the negative emotions both Hoccleve and Smart refer to, as well as the resulting impact it may have on one's personal life. However, despite these similarities, their depictions of depression indeed differ greatly due to the aforementioned factors, which influenced their works to various degrees.

There are several similarities to be found between the depictions of depression of Hoccleve and Smart. Both poets claim to have experienced the lows of depression, which consist for example of those symptoms that Hall-Flavin mentions in the introduction. Even though Hoccleve's *Compleinte* in particular is entirely occupied with the experience of such a low, while Smart only briefly mentions having experienced these "highs and lows" in the *Jubilate Agno,* it is an experience with depression that they shared at least to some extent. Furthermore, the works of both Hoccleve and Smart suggest a sense of distorted thinking which appears to be strongly influenced by their depression, even when it manifests itself differently since Hoccleve's view of the world is very negative while Smart's is extremely religious. Still, this distorted thinking and their mental illnesses in general resulted in

something that many people suffering from mental health issues have experienced: social exclusion. Again, although Smart only occasionally touches on this subject directly while Hoccleve's *Compleinte* strongly emphasizes this possible consequence of suffering from depression, both are aware that this social exclusion is the result of suffering from a mental illness that society does not understand. Consequentially, they seem to be searching for their place in the world after this social exclusion. While reactions to this from contemporaries may have differed because of the changing position of and attitudes towards religion in society, both Hoccleve and Smart seem to have found comfort in focusing their attention to God, which may be considered a coping mechanism.

Although their depictions are similar in some ways, there are several significant differences to be found that are related to the different personal and cultural backgrounds of these poets. In this thesis, it has been discussed that Thomas Hoccleve likely suffered from clinical depression, because his negative perspective in *My Compleinte* fits in with Hall-Flavin's description of this mental illness. Hoccleve depicts the world around him as being entirely against him and he is constantly looking for signs that people do regard him unfavourably and distrust him because of his mental illness. The negative perspective as put forward in this poem could easily be considered disproportionate to reality. In spite of the fact that this poem feels like a remarkably personal account, which is precisely why it stands out among other medieval accounts of mental illness, not much can be said about the extent to which Hoccleve's personal life influenced his poetic works. However, it has become clear in this thesis that the culture in which Hoccleve lived certainly influenced how he chose to construct his *Compleinte* and *Dialogue with a Friend.* For example, his choice to try and adjust his appearance to what would be deemed normal stems from a belief prominent in his culture that mental illness is visible. Furthermore, his conviction at the end of his *Compleinte* that both the cause and the solution to his mental illness lies in religion equally stems from

cultural beliefs. His conviction of God's influence on his mental health would have been considered acceptable as well, because religion was much more influential in Hoccleve's time than it was in Smart's time.

Whereas Hoccleve may have suffered from clinical depression, Smart more likely suffered from bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression. This may partially be concluded from Smart's own statement in the *Jubilate Agno* that he experienced both extreme highs and lows, which is characteristic for bipolar disorder. Furthermore, the extremely religious nature of the *Jubilate Agno* certainly strengthens this idea that Smart suffered from this particular mental illness because it is in line with Braam's explanation of the link between increased religiousness and bipolar disorder. However, while Hoccleve was clearly strongly influenced by the dominant cultural beliefs of his time, Smart seems to be more intent on rejecting the dominant culture he lives in. While Smart did adhere to the contemporary beliefs of Methodism, he does not adhere to and even rejects the dominant beliefs that were increasingly based on science and rational thinking. Furthermore, although there are relatively few references to his personal life and his work appears to be written only from a religious and distant perspective, his personal experiences regarding his family life and his confinement have had a much greater effect on the way he constructed his *Jubilate Agno* than at first glance it may seem. The separation between Smart and his wife Anna Maria Carnan after his confinement is reflected in his *Jubilate Agno* because Smart initially speaks favourably of her, yet later rejects the idea of women altogether. Moreover, his confinement may have led to his focus on marginalized groups, and his acquaintance with his fellow inmates may be the most significant group mentioned in the *Jubilate Agno* that can be tied back to Smart's personal experiences. Overall, Smart's personal situation seems to have had a greater influence than any cultural beliefs did in his construction of the *Jubilate Agno*.

The poetic works of Thomas Hoccleve and Christopher Smart indicate that each poet may have experienced some form of depression. In spite of the great differences in their depictions based on personal and cultural background, as well as the choice to write it from a greater or lesser personal perspective, their accounts do show crucial similarities that point to a more general experience with depression. Moreover, these depictions also deal with the consequences a person may experience when they suffer from mental illness. One such consequence is social exclusion, which can have an enormous impact on a person's mental health as well as other aspects of their life. Even nowadays people who suffer from mental illness experience social exclusion, as I have mentioned in the introduction. Despite the many changes that have been made over time to improve the lives of these people and ensure more visibility for them and for their struggles, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of what mental illness is and how it may affect the life of those who suffer from mental illness.

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