# Insanity and Genius

# Insanity and Genius: Masks of Madness and the Mapping of Meaning and Value (Second Edition)

By

Harry Eiss

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Dedicated to my brother John with respect and affection

At first
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed them of
mind . . .
In the beginning, seeing, they saw amiss, and hearing,
heard not,
but like phantoms huddled
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days
Confounded.

—Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

To sleep—perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub . . .

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

. . . just as one has to turn the entire body for the eyes to see the light instead of the darkness, it is necessary to turn the entire soul away from the changing world of the senses for the eyes to see beyond them to the reality, the ultimate splendor of the higher truth. Thus, there may well be an art whose purpose it is to accomplish this very thing, the conversion of the soul's eye, not to give it that higher sight, which it already has, but to connect that sight with the world beyond it.

—Plato, *The Republic*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# PREFACE

A crisp, clean November afternoon gave the campus a still, silent quality. Except for the shoveled sidewalks surrounding and crisscrossing the open ground between the buildings, a thin sheet of crusted snow covered the ground, as if, at least for a moment, the world had paused to reflect upon itself. Even the occasional student walking rapidly from building to building could not disturb the feeling of a scene briefly frozen in time.

The seminar room had a full wall of windows jutting out from the side of the building, offering a panoramic view of nature's meditation, and the silence surrounding us gave our conversation a forbidden quality. It was just the two of us, Dr. Norton Kinghorn, who was the chair of the English department, and me. The conversation turned to the one great work of literature to come out of Spain, the work often said to have fathered the modern novel.

Norton smiled. He had a wonderful smile, and a certain Don Quixote childlike gleam that often filled his eyes. "I once had a professor who said Don Quixote was cracked in the head," he began and stopped in mid thought. The pregnant pause, the endearing smile, the mischievous eyes. Norton should have been an entertainer, for he knew how to capture the moment.

Again the silence filled the room, and the high ceiling gave it a certain spiritual quality. I waited for the punch line.

"But the crack let out a beautiful light."

*******

Pablo Picasso said "We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand." John Keats expressed the same in the climatic couplet of *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth and all ye need to know." On September 8, 1888, Vincent Van Gogh, referring to his painting *The Night Café*, wrote to his brother Theo, "I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green."

This is what I have struggled with, this higher truth, and its messengers: drama, dance, sculpture, painting—all of the arts, and such other disciplines as philosophy, psychology and neurology. It is what led me,

innocent of all the implications and reasons for it, to first submerse myself in literature and music in my desperate search for meaning as a child following my father's death.

In his book about the discovery of the structure of DNA, James Watson wrote, "So we had lunch, telling ourselves that a structure this pretty just had to exist." Indeed, the question most often asked by scientists about a scientific theory is "Is it beautiful?" Yes, truth does equal beauty. Scientists know; mathematicians know.

But the beauties, the truths of math and science were not the truths I needed as a child, and I intuitively knew it, intuitively knew that the truths I needed come from a different way of knowing, a way of knowing not of the world of logic and reason and explanation (though they help lead us to them), but rather a way of knowing that is of the world of expression.

Neurologists, led by such scientists as Roger W. Sperry, winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his pioneering work, are right now mapping it out in the human brain. I'm sure you've all heard of at least the simplified left/right brain theories based on such research, if not the details, support for, and extensions of them. Well, simply speaking, neurologists have, in fact, shown that humans think in two distinct ways, one way in the left hemisphere of the brain, the other in the right. The left hemisphere gives us our literal, non-artistic forms of thinking. It applies scientific theory and deduction to its mapping out of the world. It is denotative and deals in the truths of the physical world.

The right hemisphere is where we go beyond this to the world of meaning and value. Good, bad, right, wrong—these are not literal objects, not literal truths. They are judgments made by humans, and they exist in the human mind, in the right hemisphere, in the world of the arts (both ethical and beyond ethical to the realities of the world of faith, of the sublime, of the numinous). And these are what place humans beyond all else in existence. Only humans deal with meaning and value; it is our gift to the world. Anthropologists, evolutionists and the like say true humans appear on the scene not when crude tools are found, or weapons. No, it is when cave wall paintings are found. Why is this? It's actually rather simple and straight-forward. Paintings are a form of symbolic thought, as are all of the arts, and only humans do this. Other creatures don't attempt to influence the hunt or appease the gods with paintings or rituals or myths. Other creatures do not have this invisible world of the mind that gives a value to an otherwise meaningless universe. Only humans have eaten of the apple of the knowledge of good and evil. Only humans consciously give up physical existence for some higher or other non-physical form of existence, an existence of the spirit or soul.

Loren Eiseley in *The Immense Journey* writes:

> Symbolic communication had begun. Man had escaped out of the eternal present of the animal world into a knowledge of past and future. The unseen gods, the powers behind the world of phenomenal appearance, began to stalk through his dreams.
>
> Nature, one might say, through the powers of this mind, grossly superstitious though it might be in its naïve examination of wind and water, was beginning to reach out into the dark behind itself. Nature was beginning to evade its own limitations in the shape of this strange, dreaming and observant brain. It was a weird multi-headed universe, going on, unseen and immaterial save as its thoughts smoldered in the eyes of hunters huddled by night fires, or were translated into pictures upon cave walls, or were expressed in the trappings of myth or ritual. The Eden of the eternal present that the animal world had known for ages was shattered at last. Through the human mind, time and darkness, good and evil, would enter and possess the world.

Rollo May gives us the pinnacle of this in the following from *Man's Search for Himself*:

> Man's consciousness of himself is the source of his highest qualities. It underlies his ability to distinguish between I and the world. It gives him the capacity to keep time, which is simply the ability to stand outside the present and to imagine oneself back in yesterday or ahead in the day after tomorrow. Thus human beings can learn from the past and plan for the future. And thus man is the historical mammal in that he can stand outside and look at his history; and thereby he can influence his own development as a person, and to a minor extent he can influence the march of history in his nation and society as a whole. The capacity for consciousness of self also underlies man's ability to use symbols, which is a way of disengaging something from what it is, such as the two sounds which make up the word "table," and agreeing that these sounds will stand for a whole class of things. Thus man can think in abstractions like "beauty," "reason," and "goodness."
>
> This capacity for consciousness of ourselves gives us the ability to see ourselves as others see us and to have empathy with others. It underlies our remarkable capacity to transport ourselves into someone else's parlor where we will be in reality next week, and then in imagination to think and plan how we will act. And it enables us to imagine ourselves in someone else's place, and to ask how we would feel and what we would do if we were this other person.
>
> No matter how poorly we use or fail to use or even abuse these capacities, they are the rudiments of our ability to begin to love our neighbor, to have ethical sensitivity, to see truth, to create beauty, to devote ourselves to ideals, and to die for them if need be.

> To fulfill these potentialities is to be a person.

Isn't empathy, after all, the basis for all of the arts? We the readers empathize with the characters in a work of fiction, we actually laugh and cry for characters who are not even real, who we know do not literally exist; but they do exist, don't they, in the world of meaning and value, the same world where empathy exists, the only world that really matters.

Abelard's perspective on the Crucifixion of Christ is that it is in his suffering that he brings salvation, because his suffering causes compassion, empathy in those who are exposed to it, both in humans and in God, and it is through compassion, through humans and God coming together in passion that salvation takes place.

It is in the knowing beyond explanation, the knowing beyond logic and reason, the knowing that explanation must struggle to support, not to deny, that I immerse my students, and I watch as their eyes light up and suddenly the classroom becomes not a jail cell but a key to unlock the mental jail cells they had not thought possible to open, likely were unaware even existed. And I am humbled, for I am but the messenger, and as they connect with the message, it is clear to me that something wonderful has taken place, and I have had the privilege of being a part of it, of witnessing the transformation. Sounds a bit like a fantasy, like an overly sentimental movie, I know, yet I've witnessed it again and again.

This book takes us there, not to offer answers to the mysteries of life, but to make us aware of the beauty of them.

# A Few Notes

Today, *insanity* is mainly a legal term, a defense or excuse for actions deemed illegal, actions that the culture in the form of established laws has defined as wrong and deserving of some form of punishment. The disciplines of neurology and psychology no longer use the term, as they feel it is degrading, and have substituted other, less dramatic terms, *euphemisms*. While the current legal definitions and use of the term are interesting, they are not how I am using it. I am using it in its more emotional, historic sense. Furthermore, while current clinical terms being substituted for it are more precise within their specific disciplines, they are ironically more dehumanizing in their stubborn determination to eliminate the powerful connotations that give language much of its value. I have no interest in destroying the power of language or science by eliminating the value of meaning beyond explanation in an attempt to be *politically correct*, and the only other term I considered using instead was *madness*. As a reading of the text will prove, there is nothing at all *degrading* about being *insane*, at least not from my perspective. In fact, those deemed *insane* are perhaps the only ones who fit the category of *genius*, the artists, shamans, perhaps even saviors, condemned, ridiculed, some confined to institutions, at least one crucified. They are the humans of the highest level, the ones who have connected to the mysteries of existence beyond the meaningless physical world of the body, the ones giving us the only maps that really matter, the maps of meaning and value.

I have purposely applied as many different disciplines of human thinking to the discussions as possible, believing that interdisciplinary approaches to meaning and value are superior and that the fragmentation of our current world is represented and promoted in the contemporary embracement of discipline specific cages in academia.

My references to Vincent van Gogh simply as Vincent throughout my discussions of him are because that's what he expressly stated he wanted to be called, and that's the single name he used to sign his paintings.

The sections titled "Broken Windmills" and "Don Quixote" are revised works previously published, the first in *Children's Literature and Culture* as "Broken Windmills" the second in *Metaesthetics* as a portion of "Children of a Greater God." Such revising is a necessary part of my work. As William Butler Yeats expresses so simply and eloquently in his

preliminary poem in *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats*:

> "The friends that have it I do wrong / Whenever I remake a song / Should know what issue is at stake / It is myself that I remake." There can be no better reason for writing a book.

# Part I

The spring-knife safely hidden beneath his black waistcoat, Richard Dadd sits at the Ship Inn, waiting for his father to return. Osiris has been with him much of late, and now he is certain of what must be done.

The dinner talk has skirted the reason for it. Instead, discussions of the world of Titania and Oberon, of Puck, of the whole fairy world of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have filled the uneasy conversation. Robert Dadd has praised his son's four illustrations of Robin Goodfellow in *The Book of British Ballads*, highlighting the excellent use of dramatic lighting, a result of a better understanding of the potential of wood engraving than the other artists, carefully ignoring the darker content of a laughing Puck emerging from a shadowy world of half-born elves and frog-like images imprisoned in giant dew-drops, the knife-sharp lettering impaling one elf, the eerie, bulging eyes of the goblins.

It is a hot, humid August day, with little wind. Richard has not consumed much, three boiled eggs rolled in salt, but a pint of ale. Yet his stomach twists uncomfortably. Perhaps, he thinks, a taste of grog, sure medicine for a nervous digestive system.

He is about to order one when his father returns. "Well, are we ready then?"

Richard looks up at his father, a man who has stood staunchly and affectionately by him through the recent afflictions, insisting that they are nothing more than the effects of sunstroke and will pass with rest and quiet. But then, on the urging of others, has recently taken him to see a specialist on disorders of the mind, a cautionary measure, not to be misconstrued as more than a father's love for his son.

Osiris thunders in Richard's brain—the driving commands, the pounding headache.

He knows sunstroke is but a convenient dismissal, trivializing the tremendous transformation that he has experienced. Something took hold of him during his recent trip through the Middle East with his patron Sir Thomas Phillips. The stop in Cairo, where he experienced the exotic bazaar, a seemingly endless market-place where strange looking people wearing turbans and dark flowing robes dyed Persian red and India black mixed with wealthy Europeans in white suits and broad brimmed hats; the short jaunt to Giza, where he rode ornery camels and felt small and insignificant beneath the other-worldly Sphinx and three huge pyramids; the languid journey up the Nile through the wheat fields and white desert sands that lead the eyes into a liquid horizon; the slow, leisurely boat ride to Thebes, during which time he sketched crocodiles sliding in and out of

the mysterious waters; the endless visits to the huge Egyptian palaces and temples; the night he sat beneath a pale moon on the deck of the boat and heard a strange, low chant, a chant that aroused his curiosity and led him to peer intently over the roped rail of the boat until he could see the shadowy forms of the Egyptian and Nubian crew holding hands, forming a circle on the desert sand, twisting and writhing in an ever growing frenzy, accompanying their movements by intoned passages from the Koran, finally falling senseless in mythic submission to the ritual—all of these exotic experiences came together within him, and something took hold, something that has informed him ever since, and he knows now, now knows for certain, this man, his father, is not the kind, gentle man he appears. He pushes back his chair and stands. "Let us go."

"To Lord Darnley's," his father replies and turns toward the heavy oak door. Recently he was persuaded to call upon Dr. Alexander Sutherland, the famed alienist at St. Luke's Hospital, who did not tell him what he wanted to hear. Perhaps this visit will help. After all, his son has promised to unburden his mind. A walk through Cobham Park where Richard often sketched as a child—perhaps that is just the thing to snap him out of his recent malady.

Robert has an uneasy stomach, probably from the two bangers, the bitter ale. A trip to the wash room has not produced the results he'd hoped for. Some people, he reasons, simply have nervous digestive systems, and he has been cursed with one.

One last task before the anticipated walk.The plan is to spend the night. So, first it is necessary to stop at a nearby boarding house and reserve a room. Richard's disconnected comments during the short passage about not needing beds because they will be spending the night consorting with the witches of Macbeth are disconcerting, but Robert is getting used to such strange asides and has taught himself to discount them.

Richard, however, is becoming more agitated, speaking louder: "When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain? What's that you say? When the hurly-burly's done. When the battle's lost and won. That will be ere the set of sun." (2)

"Come, Richard, come away."

"I come, Graymalkin. Paddock calls. Anon!"

Robert takes hold of his son's shoulder and steers him toward the inn. "Come, come, let us get the arrangements made. Come before the setting sun takes away our walk."

Richard smiles, then laughs. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair. Hover through the fog and filthy air."

The clerk is an old woman, her gray hair pulled back into a carelessly pinned bun, her dress faded but still exhibiting the Scottish squares-of-red-and-green common to the current style of the region. As expected, a room is available. The woman's thick Liverpool accent reveals her origin, and combined with her insistence on mumbling through the entire exchange makes her nearly undecipherable. At first Robert thinks her comments are aimed at him and asks for clarification, but then realizes she is in her own world, her blurred commentary constituting a personal conversation that does not include him or even recognize he stands in front of her. Furthermore, to his surprise, her seemingly undirected body is able to handle the necessary basics of the transaction without interrupting this conversation in the least. And Richard is doing much the same thing, only in a louder, more disjointed fashion. Momentarily Robert again makes the mistake of thinking the comments are aimed at him, but quickly grasps that it is but an internal affair, and Richard is oblivious to the reality of the situation.

"A witch indeed, and where hast thou been, sister? Killing swine. Killing swine sayest thou? Killing swine!"

Robert takes a deep breath. This visit, which got off to a promising beginning during the meal, is now turning decidedly negative.

However, once outside, beneath the blue skies, he feels better. At least for the moment, Richard has returned to a more normal countenance. Robert forces his thoughts to be positive, strong. First, he thinks, the day itself, the weather. Admittedly, it is humid, but then that is to be expected on an August day. Yes, he concludes, nature is telling me it *is* a good day for a walk.

A good *day* for a walk, a good day for a *walk,* a *good* day for a walk. He takes hold of this phrase, playing with the emphasis, refusing to let it slip away, forcing it to deny the psychic shadows that threaten to flood in upon him, demanding his thoughts remain upbeat. And with each repetition of the phrase, his thoughts become ever more forceful. He begins to elaborate, to expand the mantra. We've had *enough* pleasantries over a meal, *enough* making lodging arrangements. It is time for what *will* be more than just a leisurely stroll, though it *will* be that. It is time for what *will* be more than just a pleasant visit, though it *will* be that as well. It is time to find out what it is that has so taken Richard, what *demon* it is that has gotten inside of his *wonderful, loving,* and *talented* soul. Indeed, Robert's hopes are gaining strength, perhaps the strength of desperation because he fears the obligation being forced upon him to take away his son's freedom.

This, then, is his state of mind as the walk begins.

The road is dry and dust becomes momentary shallow clouds of light brown-and-gray particles as Richard occasionally kicks pebbles and fine gravel into the clumps of green and yellow grass that mixes with pink, red and purple fuchsia growing along the road edge. They walk for a time in silence. The voices, Richard calls them *secret admonitions*, keep at him. Osiris wants him to fulfill his assigned duties. He is the exterminator, and he needs to rid the world of those possessed by demons, to purify the world of evil.

He remembers when it all became clear, that night in Egypt, with the old Arab men smoking a "hubbly-bubby." He joined them, and if memory serves spent five straight days and nights smoking their strange herbs. No one spoke, but he became convinced the sound of the pipe was a form of language, a means for Osiris, the Egyptian god killed by his brother, to speak to him. That was the beginning, the breakthrough. It all made sense, life out of death, resurrection, salvation. Hadn't Osiris floated down the Nile just as he had floated down the Nile? The journey, yes, the same journey. Down the Nile, into another world, not just an exotic world, but a mythic world, a world where mere physical existence merges with the spiritual, the world of the gods, a place where the rules differ, where logic and reason must bow to higher truths, truths that cannot be explained, but truths that can be known, if only one has found a way through the fabric of illusion. Hadn't Osiris, *after death*, given birth to Horus?

The days following his revelation were filled with constant headaches. Periods of depression alternated with periods of great energy and excitement when he would walk agitatedly about Alexandria or lay down at night with his "imagination so full of wild vagaries that at times" he wrote in his journal "I have really and truly doubted of my own sanity." (3) Thomas had suggested to him that his behavior had changed, had grown strange, that perhaps he was suffering from the hot, overly bright sun. But Richard had known it was more, had been in no mood for such condescending remarks, and had begun to wish he could end the journey and the entire arrangement with this patron he had once thought so promising, but now knew had not been *chosen* as he had, had not realized that the journey down the Nile was more than just a superficial experiencing of exotic sights and customs.

But whatever manifestations of divinity it might have taken on for Richard, the trip had been carefully arranged and there were still more visits to make. Rome had been promising. A chance to view the Pope. Thomas had chatted on and on about how exciting it was to be. But Richard had seen through the silly, babbling face, and when the viewing took place had been immediately possessed to want to attack this Pope,

this agent of evil. The men in Egypt, the dancing, the rituals, the silent words. The wonderful hubbly-bubbly. Osiris had known. And Osiris had wanted revenge!

But, at least for the moment, Osiris would be denied. The Pope had been well protected.

By late spring, 1843, the once friends, now disillusioned traveling companions had reached Paris, nearing the end of their lengthy journey together. By now Richard had come to see Thomas as an agent for the Devil, one of an ever growing number of people it was his mission to murder. Unaware of how seriously his life was in danger, Thomas had experienced enough of Richard's strange behavior to know it could no longer be simply attributed to the brilliance of an Egyptian sun. It was time for Richard to go home.

Back in England, Richard could reunite with his family. He had been looking forward to it. They also had anticipated a positive return. But the reunion wasn't the happy reconnection expected. Richard had changed and was prone to violent outbursts. Attempts to cover up, to ignore the erratic behavior had proven impossible. Distressed and reluctant, the family had admitted the possibility of madness, and he been brought to St. Luke's Hospital, where he had been diagnosed "non compos mentis," not sound of mind. But Richard wasn't about to be shut away. He had convinced his dad all he needed was some rest.

And now the father-son visit, an evening meal, a walk, a final chance to end this troubling behavior. How pedestrian, Richard thinks, how unenlightened. His father has not floated the Nile, can never know the higher truths.

"So," says the senior Dadd, "what is it you want to unburden? You promised a talk, an explanation for your illness. You know I wish only to help, to see you through this terrible disease. Come. It is time. Let us talk."

But Richard has grown morose, silent. Robert can see his mind is elsewhere. The shadows threaten. A *good* day for a walk. A good *day* for a walk. A good day for a *walk.*

"Come, come. Let us talk. The sun is shining. It is a *good* day. A father and his son on a walk through the friendly landscape of our past. What better way to spend a summer evening?"

Richard stops, turns his eyes upon his father's face, opens and then shuts his mouth.

Robert returns the look, trying to give his eyes a friendly, inviting welcome. It seems to him Richard is ready, finally ready to open up, to explain and reconnect.

A dark scowl crosses Richard's continence, but quickly dissipates.

His father stands patient, waiting. He has seen such changing masks much of late, knows his son is struggling. It makes no sense to him, but he is determined to see his son, his *favorite* son through it. In truth it seems his whole family is falling apart. Not only is Richard struggling, but the younger son George is exhibiting similar hallucinations, similar dangerous tendencies. Perhaps it is just something in the air, something his sons need a medicine to put aside. (4)

The silence is all he hears. Though robins and sparrows chatter away in peace, he hears none of it, just the silence that surrounds his son. He waits, patiently, he waits.

But no words come.

Robert nearly breaks, nearly gives in to the shadows. It *is* a good day. It *is* a good day. The mantra has shifted slightly, but he does not notice. He is too focused on the repetition, on the needed blocking mechanism. He refuses to enter the nightmare that threatens him.

They resume the walk, at first slow, but then gaining rapidity as Richard grows more anxious, rushed, determined, focused. Now the gravel spreads from his shoes not because he casually kicks at it, but because he pushes so forcefully against the ground to gain momentum.

Robert walks faster to keep up with his son. Such a promising artist. Brilliant. Already proclaimed one of the best of the young artists in England. Already having created *Come unto these Yellow Sands, Titania Sleeping*, and the highly acclaimed panels for Lord Foley. (5) Now such a mystery. This disease. What is one to make of it?

Stumbling, almost tripping and falling from the abruptness of it, Richard turns off Cobham road, and pounds straight through the oak trees and wheat grass, through the pole fence, down toward the Paddock Hole chalk pit.

Robert follows, not sure what his son is up to, but hoping against hope something will snap here, and he can bring his son back, back from wherever this illness has taken him. It must be the heat, sunstroke—the sun *is* too brilliant in Egypt, too much to take. Just a bit more time, he keeps telling himself, just a bit more time, soon he will recover.

Then, right above Paddock Hole, Richard comes to a sudden stop, finds the razor in his picket, the words of Osiris all he can hear. Now! Now is the moment! Now the deed must be done! Quick! Quick!"

He turns, nearly knocking Robert over, tries to bring the razor across the exposed throat, but an arm gets in the way. A clean cut isn't possible. Osiris! The spring-knife! His waistcoat! Thrusting! Thrusting! Thrusting!

There is no cry out. It doesn't matter.

From that day on, Richard no longer remembers his father.

Osiris has largely taken over. But that doesn't mean he is completely helpless. He has a passport to France ready. It is nothing to hire a boat at Dover for 10 pounds. Such actions suggest a carefully planned murder. However, the sane, reasoned aspects make his behavior more bizarre when mixed with the obvious insanity, and one can only guess at his reasons or lack thereof for making his escape in the same bloodied clothes he wore to kill his father. He doesn't bother to change or wash up until he has gotten all the way to Calais. Once there, he proceeds on his next assignment to kill the emperor of Austria.

The London police find the dismembered body, think at first that Richard Dadd, rather than being the criminal, is also a likely victim of the same person who has killed his father, and begin searching about Cobham for his body or artifacts or any clue that might lead to the real killer. However, upon notifying his brother, the police are alerted to the recent odd behavior. They search his apartment in London and find the world of a deranged man, over three hundred eggs, the carpet covered with egg shells, bottles upon bottles of ale, and a sketchbook filled with portraits of family and friends, all depicted with throats slashed. Now the search for Richard Dadd is no longer to save him but to save others *from* him. But he has already left the country.

On his way, traveling in a diligence through a forest of Valance near Fontainebleau, he becomes entranced with the cravat and collar of a fellow passenger, who tolerantly lets him play with it for a time. However, when this man asks for it back, Richard produces a razor and attempts to cut his throat. Once again the razor attack does not work. This time he is subdued and turned over to the French authorities, where apparently Osiris leaves him for a time, as he promptly confesses to his activities, including the murder of his father, and even turns over what money he has as recompense for his latest victim's welfare.

The police find in his possession a list of people "who must die" with his father at the top.

Later, Richard himself will write: "These and the like, coupled with the idea of a descent from the Egyptian god Osiris, induced me to put a period to the existence of him whom I had always regarded as a parent, but whom the secret admonishings I had counseled me was the author of the ruin of my race. I inveigled him, by false pretences, into Cobham Park, and slew him with a knife, with which I stabbed him, after having vainly endeavoured to cut his throat." (6)

Under French law there is no need for a trial. Instead Richard Dadd is immediately committed and passed through various insane asylums in Melun, Brie, St. Denis and Luzarches to Clarmont.

On May 1, 1844, the *Art Union,* reports:

> He took no notice whatever of pencils, colours, and canvas they [his family] had sent him; retaining, it would appear, no sort of memory of his former pursuits, and never giving the slightest indication of a desire to produce a picture. His employment all day is to stand in the courtyard, with up-turned eyes, gazing at the sun, which he calls his father. (7)

The following July he is extradited to England, where two preliminary hearings are held at Rochester Magistrates' Court, and on August 22, 1844, he is transferred to the State Criminal Lunatic Asylum, Bethlem Hospital, famous as a cruel institution for the insane, conditions and treatment so horrible that it gives the English language the origin of the word Bedlam.

This institution where Richard is to spend the next twenty years originated as Bethlehem, located on Bishopsgate Street (current site of Liverpool Street Station) in 1247, founded by Simon Fitz Mary (or Fitzmary; sources are contradictory here), an alderman and sheriff of the city, as a priory for the Order of St. Mary of Bethlehem, "originally intended for the poor suffering from any ailment and for such as might have no other lodging, hence its name *Bethlehem*, in Hebrew, "the house of bread." (8) In 1330 it was granted a license as a hospital, and by the 1400s there are records that people deemed insane were being lodged there. Because of his separation from the Catholic Church, Henry VIII issued The First Act of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536, and in 1547 put Bethlem under the jurisdiction of the City of London, with the governors of the Bridewell House of Correction in charge. For the next three centuries, its own uneven records and other writings indicate that it became ever more an asylum for the lodging or imprisonment of the insane, and by the 1600s a place for the public to view the insane under the most horrific confinement and display. After the Great Fire of London in 1666, Robert Hooke designed a new hospital, Bethlem in Moorfields, modeled on Tuileries in France, and this new facility opened in 1676. *Mania* and *Melancholy*, statues by Caius Gabriel Cibber depicting the inmates chained and in states of insanity, were meant to draw visitors into the hospital, which now became a popular and featured tourist site, a human zoo.

Ebenezer Haskell paraphrases and then quotes Edward Wakefield's speech to the Committee of the House of Commons about his two visits to Bethlem Hospital April 25 and May 2, 1814, providing a clear and disturbing picture of how insanity was understood at this time.

First, paraphrasing Edward Wakefield, Haskell writes:

> In the women's galleries, one of the side rooms contained about ten patients, each chained by one arm or leg to the wall, the chain allowing them merely to stand up by the bench or form fixed to the wall, or to sit down on it. The nakedness of each patient was covered by a blanket, made into something like a dressing-gown, but with nothing to fasten it in front. This was the whole covering, the feet being naked. In another part he [Edward Wakefield] found many of the unfortunate women locked up in their cells, naked, and chained on straw, with only one blanket for a covering. In the men's wing, in the side room, six patients were chained close to the wall, five hand cuffed, and one locked to the wall by the right arm, as well as by the right leg; he was very noisy; all were naked except as to the blanket-gown or small rug on the shoulders, and without shoes—their nakedness and their mode of confinement gave this room the complete appearance of a dog-kennel.

Then directly quoting Wakefield, he continues:

> "In one of the cells of the lower gallery we saw William Norris. He stated himself to be fifty-five years of age and that he had been confined about fourteen years; that in the consequence of attempting to defend himself from what he conceived the improper treatment of his keeper, he was fastened by a long chain, which, passing through a partition, enabled the keeper, by going into the next cell, to draw him close to the wall at pleasure; that to prevent this, Norris muffled the chain with straw, so as to hinder it passing through the wall; that he afterwards was confined in the manner we saw him, namely, a stout iron ring was riveted round his neck, from which a short chain passed to a ring made to slide upwards and downwards, on an upright massive iron bar, more than six feet high, inserted into the wall; round his body a strong iron bar about two inches wide, was riveted; on each side of the bar was a circular projection, which, being fastened to and enclosing each of his arms, pinioned them close to his sides. This waist-bar was secured by two similar bars, which passing over his shoulders, were riveted to the waist-bar, both before and behind. The iron ring round his neck was connected to the bars on his shoulders by a double link; from each of these bars another short chain passed to the ring on the upright bar. We were informed he was enabled to raise himself so as to stand against the wall on the pillow of his bed in the trough bed in which he lay; but it is impossible for him to advance from the wall in which the iron bar is soldered, on account of the shortness of the chains, which were only twelve inches long. It was, I conceive, equally out of his power to repose in any other position than on his back, the projections on each side of the waist-bar enclosed his arms, rendering it impossible for him to lie on his side, even if the length of the chain from his neck and shoulders would permit it. His right leg was chained to the trough, in

> which he had remained thus encaged and chained for more than twelve years."
>
> A marvelous example, truly, of what the human constitution may accommodate itself to. Poor Norris was not released from this confinement until about three weeks or a month before his death, which, notwithstanding the opinion of Dr. Monro, the physician then at the head of the medical department, may well be thought to have been hastened by the treatment to which he was subjected. That gentleman being asked whether he did not think that the pulmonary complaint of which Norris died might have been produced by the great quantity of iron he wore for many years, replied, "I think not."
>
> When asked—"Do you think a person could have had about him a weight of iron say six or eight-and-twenty points; that he could have been confined to his bed without being allowed to turn around for nine years, or without being able to get out and sit on the edge of his bed, being chained by the head by a chain only twelve inches from the iron stanchion, and that would have no effect upon his general health?"
>
> "It did not appear to have any general effect upon his health—he was in very good health till within a very short period of his death."
>
> The apothecary coincided in his colleague's opinion, and even became enthusiastic about the excellence of restraint by means of irons. In reply to a question, he asserted that to secure the patient with irons was a thousand times less objectionable than the strait-waistcoat, and that, footlocked and manacled, he was rendered an "innoxious animal." (9)

A year later, in 1815, partially the result of Wakefield's public condemnations of the current state of the institution, Bethlem was moved to Southgate, and the next year was officially established as a place for insane criminals, and remained as such until 1864.

By the time Richard Dadd is situated there in 1844, conditions have improved from Edward Wakefield's reported experience. Though Richard is transported to his new residency in a strait-jacket, once admitted he is never again subject to any kind of physical restraint, and does not experience the horrible abuse of previous patients.

That does not mean conditions are either good or defensible. At the time of his interment, the institution has been divided into two blocks, one for women and one for men. No other separations are made, and thus Richard is crammed together with the most violent and degraded of English criminals.

Indeed, Bethlem retains many of the same characteristics of the original structure. The gallery is some 100 feet long, lit by but one small, heavily barred window at each end. The inmates' sleeping rooms open off each side of the gallery. Dining tables sit in the middle of the basement gallery, and there are two small sink and water-closets on either side of the main

passage. The three floors above are much the same, except also holding a bath room. Several portions of the galleries are divided by iron rods of wires into cages to allow separation of the patients without locking them in their rooms.

The physicians to the institution are not permanent residents but, rather, simply visit the hospital on occasion. Records are almost nonexistent. Thus, beyond knowing the obviously unpleasant conditions and lack of much being done to understand and help any of the inmates, including Richard Dadd, it is hard to know just what his physical and mental conditions are. However, an article from the *Art Union* suggests a surprising change has taken place in just one year:

> He is in good health; and we have lately seen some drawings recently executed by him which exhibit all the power, fancy, and judgement [sic] for which his works were eminent previous to his insanity. They are absolutely wonderful in delicate finish. They consist principally of landscapes—memories of Eastern scenes, or wrought from a small sketch book in his possession. One is, however, of an avenue of close box-tree, terminated by the tall gate of a mansion. It is a marvelous production, such as scarcely any of our living painters could surpass. This drawing was, we believe, produced within the last few weeks. (10)

The reasons for both his improved mental condition and his renewed interest in his art must remain speculative. However, it is at least likely that two of the attending physicians at the time, Dr. Edward Thomas Monro and Dr. Alexander Morison have some responsibility for it.

Dr. Monro is a fourth generation physician at the hospital and holds a highly respected position as an expert on insanity or lunacy. Court records at the time indicate that he testifies at 400 trials involving madness, and only twice do his findings not match the verdict (and in both of those cases, the original verdicts were later suspended). More important in terms of Dadd's renewed interest in his art is that Monro's family is famous for its support of artists. Monro's grandfather, John Monro seriously studied engraving, and his father Thomas Monro is considered the most important patron of the English school of watercolor painting. (11) In 1976, an exhibition of the work of Dr. Edward Thomas Monro and the artists of his circle is held at Victoria and Albert Museum. A catalogue is published, titled, *Dr. Monro and the Monro Academy.* (12) His brother is considered a brilliant draughtsman. Indeed, he grew up surrounded by the artists and art works of his day—Turner, Linnel, Hunt, Cotman, De Wint, and the Hoppners. Certainly Dr. Monro knows what is going on in the art world surrounding him, and since Dadd is highly acclaimed, there can be no

doubt Monro knows he has a famous/infamous painter in his asylum. So it is likely he supplies Dadd with materials and encourages him to continue with his art.

However, though Monro is both an art connoisseur and an acclaimed expert on insanity, his mismanagement of Bedlam, negligence and mistreatment of the patients, and nearly nonexistent records result in a scandal, revealing that, if he does encourage Dadd's artistic activities, it is not for therapeutic reasons, but rather for the celebrity Monro might gain from it.

The other attending physician, Dr. Alexander Morison is not at the center of the English art scene. But he is a highly respected specialist in mental diseases, whose publications include *Outlines of Lectures in Mental Diseases* (1826), *Cases of Mental Diseases* (1828) and *The Physiognomy of Mental Diseases* (1840). While he does advocate a bit less cruel treatment of patients then what is in general use, he still believes in the use of strait-jackets, and as with Monro, he does not give his patients at Bedlam much time or attention, preferring instead to focus on his lectures on insanity in London and Edinburgh, his other patients at Hanwell, and mainly his aristocratic clientele in private practice.

Morison becomes especially intriguing in trying to understand Dadd's relations with his physicians because of a portrait Dadd completes of him in 1852.

Morison believes in the now largely discounted doctrine of physiognomy, the theory that a patient's facial expression reveals his underlying mental state. In the portrait, Dadd puts Morison's own physiognomy to the test. Using a sketch by Morison's daughter Ann of the grounds of Anchorfield, Alexander Morison's childhood home on the shores of the Firth of Forth, Dadd, never having seen the original landscape, creates a strange scene including two sailing ships on the Fife coastline and two Newhaven fishwives. It would be interesting to know what Morison thinks of the physiognomy presented. With only the painting itself to judge by, it might be claimed Morison is austere, though a hint of kindness might be found in the mouth. He is 73 at the time of the painting, has recently witnessed the death of his wife of nearly 50 years, and has just been forced to retire from Bethlem the result of the horrendous conditions there. Nevertheless, though presenting a man separate from the rest of the scene, and perhaps lonely, the painting does not seem an overly negative portraiture or meant to carry any serious distain. In fact, the simple fact Dadd completes it suggests a friendly relationship.

Whatever encouragement and friendship these two highly respected mental physicians possibly offer Dadd, and whatever the reasons might be for their actions or lack thereof, they are not giving Bethlam the attention it needs.

In 1852 The Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Secretary of State on Bethlem Hospital removes both from their positions in a highly public scandal, and a resident physician superintendent position is established to take the place of the visiting physicians. (13) Dr. William Charles Hood is appointed to this position and is "one of the most outstanding in Bethlem's history." (14) He immediately begins making life less harsh for the patients, providing every ward with an aviary, enlarging the windows to bring in more light, increasing the living space, even adding pictures, plants and statues.

Nevertheless, improvements are relative. Even as enlightened a physician superintendent as Hood finds his attempts at improvement slow going, and in 1855 still describes Bethlam as having "dark, gloomy, and inefficiently warmed" wards where "the windows are small and unnecessarily laden with iron bars, the staircases with iron gates, . . . [and where] the absence of all workshops for occupation, and the scanty means of amusement at our disposal render the daily life of all the patients irksome." (15)

In 1857 *The Quarter Review,* sounding much the same as reports from previous centuries, describes the wards as "more like those which enclose the fiercer carnivore at the Zoological Gardens than anything we have elsewhere seen employed of the detention of afflicted humanity." (16)

These galleries are where Dadd spends most of his first thirteen years at Bethlem. Occasionally patients are allowed into the exercise yard, little more than an open, featureless yard surrounded by walls. Occasionally friends or family visit, though it seems that for Dadd such visits are rare.

Especially in his earlier years, Dadd is as likely to be as belligerent as any of the other patients, but as time goes on he becomes less so. Certainly, his psyche is multi-dimensional, and in 1854, Hood writes of him as being "a very sensible and agreeable companion" and showing himself in his conversations to have "a mind once well educated and thoroughly informed in all the particulars of his profession in which he still shines." (17) However, this does not mean he is free of his delusions, and though he might have become less prone to being disagreeable, it is clear he is still capable of violent emotions. Osiris remains a strong part of his mental life to the day he dies.

In 1857 Hood is able to convert a ward in the main hospital and move Dadd along with about forty of the other "better class" patients into more

friendly accommodations which include access to a billiard table and a library. In an article on March 31, 1860, the *Illustrated London News* praises Hood for the "admirable and highly useful improvements that have taken place." (18) Upon visiting the hospital in 1863, W. M. Rossetti reports finding Dadd in a "large airy room." (19)

It is also clear that Hood and Dadd have a friendly personal relationship. While there is little to go on here it is obvious that Hood not only encourages Dadd to continue with his art but collects many of Dadd's paintings and drawings, possessing a total of thirty-three upon his death, and in addition Dadd gives Hood perhaps his second greatest work, *Contradiction. Oberon and Titania*, a painting he has worked on specifically for Hood for four years.

Within a year of Rossetti's visit, Dadd is moved into even better conditions. The new criminal asylum in Berkshire, Broadmoor Hospital is completed, and all criminal patients are transferred. One can only imagine Dadd's emotions on the train seeing the English countryside for the first time in twenty years. And the new quarters have to delight him. No longer is life to be restricted to the small bedroom, the crowded gallery and the dank prison yard. Broadmoor purposely opens up the environment to the outside world as much as possible. Terraces in the back cover up the brick walls and allow what must seem once-upon-a-time views of the wooded fields that stretch for miles. Rhododendrons and laurels intertwine the iron railings in Victorian elegance; perhaps enough to allow for the illusion of his family's cultured life when he was a child.

During the years he spends here, his general mental state appears to remain about the same. His major artwork at Broadmoor consists of a number of theatre murals and other works for the stage, most of which no longer survive. He also reads a good deal of classical literature, history, and poetry; and is considered a skilled violinist.

However, while his outbursts become less frequent and he is able at times to separate himself from his feelings of being controlled by Osiris and other spirits, and to talk about this part of himself in a detached manner, as if resigned to being misunderstood, he is never able to completely free himself from his torments. An article in *The World* (20) writes of him being still held by "thick-coming horrors and portentous visions—meditative, gloomy, abstracted . . . a recluse doing the honours of his modest unpretending abode; a pleasant-visaged old man with a long and flowing snow-white beard, with mild blue eyes that beam benignly through spectacles when in conversation, or turn up when in reverie till their pupils are nearly lost to sight. He is dressed with extreme simplicity in gray 'dittos'; his manner is unassuming, but impressive and perfectly

courteous; his utterance slow, not as though ideas were lacking, but as if he wished to weigh carefully his words before he spoke them." His hair is snow-white, and though he comes from a family that is robust into old age, he is not so.

He will live still nine more years, becoming ill with consumption in 1885 and dying January 8, 1886. By this time his family has dispersed and the only person informed of his death is Elizabeth Langley, a childhood friend whose sister has married his brother Robert, and who has previously written the hospital to inquire about him on her sister's behalf. He is buried in a peaceful, tiny cemetery at Broadmoor. His sister, Mary Ann, living at the time in America, writes in her epitaph for him: "I am truly thankful to know him at rest. It is less grief to me, than it was to think of him in the changed condition in which he has lived for many years past, his life has been to me a living death." (21)

The Getty Museum online site succinctly states the dry facts:

> Richard Dadd was born August 1, 1817 in Chatham, Kent, England. The fourth of eleven children of a chemist and druggist, Richard Dadd began his artistic training at the age of thirteen. He studied miniature painting, portraiture, and landscapes and was accepted to the prestigious Royal Academy for further study after turning twenty. Academy professors remarked on his gentleness, cheerful good nature, and great promise as an artist.
>
> Dadd's Neoclassical paintings of ancient subjects, theatrical in concept, followed in the tradition of Lawrence Alma Tadema. He painted scaled-down human figures in small, luminous landscapes of carefully rendered plants and flowers.
>
> In 1842 Dadd left England on a one-year drawing trip throughout Europe and the Middle East. Shortly after his return, he lost his sanity, as had three of his siblings. Dadd murdered his father, attempted to kill a stranger, and spoke of killing the pope and the emperor of Austria, insisting that the Egyptian god Osiris requested these acts. In 1843 the courts and his family committed him to an insane asylum, where he remained for the next forty-three years, continuing to paint. (22)

That Dadd kills his father and is confined in Bethlem and later Broadmoor might make for an interesting, though depressing biography, especially if an imaginative writer can embellish it or if a historian can use it to help reveal the conditions and views of the insane in 19th century England. However, in and of itself, it does not make for an exceptional life.

## Part II

*The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke* hangs in the Tate Gallery. It is oil-on-canvas, about 21 ¼ by 15 ½ inches, and there can be no doubt but that it was commissioned by George Henry Haydon, Dr. Hood's assistant at Bethlem, as the complete title states it: *Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke. Painted for G. H. Hayden, Esqr by Rd. Dadd / quasi 1855 – 1864*.

This commission and other materials indicate that Dadd and George Henry Haydon had a friendship based on a mutual embracement of artistic expression. Though Haydon never considered himself an artist, he drew constantly, mostly humorous sketches exhibiting notable skills, illustrations for books, and drawings for *Punch.* As a member of the Langham Sketching Club he became friends with such important illustrators as George Cruikshank, Charles Keene, and John Leech. (23) According to his obituary in *Under the Dome: The Quarterly Magazine of the Bethlem Royal Hospital* he was a very friendly man who "made numerous friends and no enemies during his term of office." (24)

The title of the work, by including the word "*quasi*" also confirms that Dadd did not consider the painting finished, though he had worked on it for nine years, and a close study of it reveals that some of the nuts, a piece of grass, and the woodman's axe are only sketched in, in contrast with the microscopic detail of the rest of it. (25) What is likely is that he was interrupted from finishing it when he was moved to Broadmoor in 1864.

However, though the actual painting was put aside, he did not put aside his connections to it. He repainted it in watercolor, the details extraordinarily similar, especially since he did it from memory. (26) Perhaps, however, as Patricia Allderidge suggests, some of the changes "such as the fact that the grasses are now in flower, and the great proliferation of calligraphic swirls across the surface, as well as the completely different colour and tonality, suggest that he did not intend to make a literal copy but rather a translation into another style and mood." (27)

He also wrote *Elimination of a Picture & Its Subject—Called the Feller's Master Stroke* the following January, a "long, rambling and sometimes incoherent poem" where he "explains the action in the painting . . . and digresses on a number of subjects, some tenuously related to it, and some which seem to have slipped in while no one was looking." (28)

Two copies of the poem have been found and, according to John MacGregor, are identical. Having personally viewed the autographed copy in possession of Haydon's relatives, MacGregor makes a good case for it