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ARTICLE

‘your poore distressed suppliant’: ‘Madness’, Emotion and the Archive in Early Modern England

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship(s) between ‘madness’, emotion and the archive in early modern England, taking as its case study the letters of British Library Lansdowne MS vol. 99, sent between *c*. 1570 and *c*. 1600 to the government of Elizabethan England and annotated at several stages in their history to describe their authors and contents as ‘mad’. Firstly, by examining the complex history of the archive, it demonstrates the potential for archival practices to bring into focus, and thereby facilitate historical examination of, past emotion. Secondly, it explores some of the ethical and methodological problems of third-party historical descriptions of madness, demonstrating that a focus on emotion – in particular ‘distress’ – offers a more fruitful path to understanding the significance of this material. Thirdly, it explores the Lansdowne 99 authors’ experiences of distress, revealing the ways distressed subjects exercised rhetorical agency when petitioning those in power. It identifies a series of prominent themes: desperation and deservingness; victimhood and persecution; and appeals to status and lineage. Ultimately, I argue that understanding their distress not only brings us closer to marginalised people in the past, but grants us a richer knowledge of past societies and the experience of being human in them.

Keywords: archives; emotion; distress; early modern; England

Introduction

> You are placed by Christ in paradyce, as Adam was in the begyning to dresse the Garden, to Pull up the weedes, and to Cherishe the good hearbes, That when god in the Coole of the daie, doth Come to walke therin he mai finde all thinges well, And now my good mistress, Mistress Gardener, wher shall the Crymbles growe so that this cold wynter the frost may not kill them, Consideringe we are some

> of the sweete smelling flowers unto god, wherfor I praie yow to looke unto us being now in veary great neede of your highnes graciouse goodness …[1]

So wrote the Irishman Roger Crimble to Queen Elizabeth I in one of a pair of 'strange letters' composed in January 1593.[2] Crimble has been unremarked upon by historians in the four centuries since he left his fleeting mark on the historical record, but a little can be discerned about his life.[3] He appears to have been an agent of the English Crown, extending credit to English military forces present in Ireland.[4] From April 1585 his name began featuring on lists of suitors for Irish debts until in August 1586 it was recorded that his debt had been settled.[5] Years later, in 1594, he sent a 'humble petition' to Elizabeth's Lord Treasurer, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, thanking him for a payment of £25 but requesting a further £15.[6] Crimble's final appearance in the archive was in February 1595, when Burghley wrote 'in consideracion of his long & dutyfull service well knowne both to the Cownsell of England and Ireland' to ask the Lord deputy 'to pass unto him £20 land … according to hir highness former gratious pleasure'.[7] While for most of his career Crimble was a valued government asset in the murky and violent context of the Tudor (re)conquest of Ireland, his missives of 1593 strike an altogether different tone, wandering idiosyncratically across Scripture, prophecy and biography. As such, they tell us less about Tudor-era Anglo-Irish politics than they are suggestive of the experience of somebody in extreme practical and emotional distress.

Through examining the writings of Crimble and others, this article does three things. Firstly, it extends current scholarship on the 'archival turn' by demonstrating how archive formation and archival practices can focus attention on, construct and, in so doing, facilitate historical examination of past emotion through processes of documentary description and 'methodisation'.[8] Secondly, it explores some of the ethical and methodological problems of third-party historical descriptions of madness, proposing that a history of emotions approach can be more a more fruitful and ethical line of scholarly enquiry.[9] And thirdly, it addresses the role of a hitherto neglected emotion – distress – in a collection of letters written to the ruling authorities of Elizabethan

[1] Lansdowne 99 n. 17, fo. 46[r].

[2] *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts in the British Museum with Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters* (1819), 190. The origin of the quoted descriptors is discussed below. Dates are given in New Style throughout, with the year taken to begin on 1 January. Original spelling is maintained in quotations from sixteenth-century sources, except for the modernisation of i/j and u/v.

[3] Cf. Henry Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English history* (3rd ser., III, 1846), 61.

[4] On this context see Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447–1603* (2nd edn, 2014), ch. 12.

[5] Calendar of State Papers Ireland (CSPI), CXVI, 15, SP 63/116 fo. 57; CXVIII, 81, SP 63/118 fo. 161; CXXIV, 79–79a, SP 63/124 fo. 164; CXXV, 23, SP 63/125 fo. 51; CXXV, 39, SP 63/125 fo. 162; CXXV, 63, SP 63/125 fo. 222.

[6] CSPI, CLXXIII, 25, 14 Feb. 593–4, SP 63/173 fo. 85.

[7] CSPI, CLXXVIII, 64SP 63/178 fo. 153.

[8] On the archival turn, see Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi and Alessandro Silvestri, 'Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History', *European History Quarterly*, 46.3 (2016).

[9] I elaborate on the history of emotions further below. Key works include Peter and Carol Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90.4 (1985), 813–36; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001); Barbara Rowenstein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (New York, 2007); Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory*, 51.2 (2012), 193–220.

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England. In doing so it maps the contours of the experience of distress in sixteenth-century England for the first time, revealing the ways in which distressed subjects sought to exercise rhetorical and epistolary agency when petitioning those in power.[10] Overall, it advances scholarship on the archival turn, the history of emotions and early modern epistolary culture, by drawing out under-appreciated connections between archives, sources, emotions and historical subjects.

The focus of the article is a corpus of about fifty letters collected together within the Elizabethan State Papers which were annotated at key points in their archival history to describe their authors or contents as 'crazy', 'deranged', 'distracted', 'mad', 'insane', etc. Sent between *c.* 1570 and *c.* 1600 to the governing authorities of Elizabethan England by a range of authors, they are preserved as part of the Burghley Papers, housed within volume 99 of the British Library's Lansdowne Manuscripts. [11] The article uses the letters of Lansdowne 99 to reveal the archival and epistolary construction and expression of distress in Elizabethan England. The first part explores the relationship between the sources and the archive, and argues that a focus on the historical experience and expression of 'distress' offers a more fertile and nuanced framework for understanding the significance of this material than the language of 'madness'. Analysis of the sources in the second part of the essay identifies a series of prominent themes that characterised the epistolary experience and expression of distress in Elizabethan England. Religion also forms a significant part of these letters; indeed, there is a long historiographical tradition exploring the relationship between Protestantism and despair.[12] However, having explored the relationship between religious change and distress elsewhere,[13] in this article I engage more directly with three central themes that characterised individuals' experiences and expression of distress: desperation and deservingness; victimhood and persecution; and appeals to status and lineage. By illuminating these themes for Elizabethan England for the first time I identify, if not a specific 'script', then at least a common repertoire of cultural resources and preoccupations which those experiencing distress drew upon, in distinctive combinations but not entirely dissimilar ways. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the archival history of Lansdowne 99 played a significant role in both constructing and revealing the emotion present in these letters from the moment of composition through their subsequent organisation and grouping. Reading such letters for evidence of

[10]Hannah Newton touches on distress in *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford, 2012), particularly chapter 4, and it is occasionally referenced elsewhere, e.g. Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards (eds.), *Early Modern Trauma: Europe and the Atlantic World* (Lincoln, NB, 2021). But, for example, as of August 2025 the Brepols *Bibliography of British and Irish History* only lists two works relating to sixteenth-century England with 'distress' in the title, both in the economic rather than the emotional sense of the term.

[11]The authors are of varying social status but are mostly male: of the *c.* 50 letters considered here, 3 are by women. While there is not enough evidence to sustain a comparative discussion, I consider some of the ways in which the experience of distress was gendered.

[12]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, intro. Anthony Giddens (London, 2001); Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries* (New York, 1990); Margot Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, 2013); John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, 1991); Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), 28–9.

[13]Jonathan Willis, '"Strange Enthusiastical Exhortations": Distress, Religious Identity and the English Reformation', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2025), 1–30.

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their authors' distress grants us a clearer understanding both of the experience of marginalised people in the past and of the society and culture in which they lived.

Archives, 'madness' and emotion

How do you solve a problem like Lansdowne 99? Or, why does such an extraordinary collection of material survive, and what is the historian to make of it?[14] Since the onset of the 'archival turn' historians increasingly accept the importance of understanding the ways in which cultures and practices of documentary selection, rejection, storage, organisation, curation and ownership have shaped our sources.[15] The Burghley Papers are composed of 122 folio volumes of state papers and other miscellaneous documents, largely from the reign of Elizabeth I.[16] The collection descended through the family of Sir Michael Hickes, one of Lord Burghley's two principal secretaries between 1580 and 1598, ending up in the possession of the antiquarian John Strype in 1682.[17] It remained in Strype's possession until his death in 1737, passing via the antiquary James West to Lord Shelburne, first Marquis of Lansdowne, and finally to the British Museum. The papers were catalogued and bound in the early nineteenth century, forming the first portion of the much larger collection of Lansdowne's manuscripts.[18] The remainder of William and Robert Cecil's documents, originally housed across Whitehall, Burghley House and Salisbury House, were requisitioned by warrant and dispersed between the State Paper Office and Hatfield House.[19]

The selection principles that determined which papers were retained by Hickes are uncertain, although Alan Smith has noted that Hickes was largely responsible for matters concerning patronage.[20] The Burghley Papers have the following composition. Volume 1 contains medieval patents, grants, warrants and charters.[21] Volumes 2–87 are chronologically organised and contain correspondence addressed to Burghley interspersed with state papers and other documents. While they might loosely be described as concerning 'patronage', they also relate more widely to Church and university affairs (Burghley was Chancellor of Cambridge from 1559 to 1598), the courts, trade

[14]See James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, 'Introduction: The Early Modern Letter Opener', in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (Philadelphia, 2016), 9.

[15]See de Vivo, Guidi and Silvestri, 'Archival Transformations'; Alexandra Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe', *Past and Present*, 230 Supplement 11 (2016), 9–48; Kate Peters, Alexandra Walsham, and Liesbeth Corens (eds.), *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Proceedings of the British Academy 212; Oxford, 2018).

[16]*A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, ix.

[17]W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, 'John Strype as a Source for the Study of Sixteenth Century English Church History', *Studies in Church History*, 11 (1975), 239–40; Cecile Zinberg, 'The Usable Dissenting Past: John Strype and Elizabethan Puritanism', in *The Dissenting Tradition: Essays for Leland H Carlson*, ed. Michael Moody and Robert Cole (Athens, 1975), 123–39.

[18]*A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, xii; C. Hurst, 'Douce, Francis (1757–1834), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*), https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7849.

[19]Robin Harcourt Williams, 'The Cecil Papers: Four Centuries of Custodial History', *The Cecil Papers* (Proquest), http://www.proquest.com/go/CECIL_HatfieldHouse.pdf [accessed 17 Jun. 2024].

[20]Alan G. R. Smith, 'The Secretariats of the Cecils, circa 1570–1612', *The English Historical Review*, 83.328 (1968), 484. See also Alan G. R. Smith, *Servant of the Cecils: The Life of Sir Michael Hickes, 1543–1612* (1977).

[21]*A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, 1–2.

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and foreign affairs, and politics and religion in the broadest senses.[22] Volumes 88–93 relate to the affairs of Hickes and matters after the death of Burghley.[23] Following that, the archive takes on a different character. Volumes 94–104 contain assorted dated documents, ranging (for the most part) across the later sixteenth century.[24] They are not precisely thematic, but they do contain themed clusters of material: for example, volume 96 contains letters to and from Catholic political and religious leaders; volume 98 contains documents relating to Protestant nations; and volume 100 contains documents pertaining to overseas trade. The remaining volumes (105–22) are collections of undated miscellaneous papers, again with some thematic clustering (volume 111 contains papers relating to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Channel Islands; volume 113 contains correspondence with China and Africa, etc.).[25] Volume 117 belonged to Sir Francis Walsingham; volume 118 was Burghley's private memorandum book; and volumes 115, 116 and 119 were miscellanies 'of Mr Strype's collection'.

Lansdowne 99 therefore sits among the volumes inhabited by thematic clusters of dated documents. It is a folio volume approximately 35 cm × 25 cm, faced in pale tan cloth-covered boards with dark brown half-Morocco trim and gold embossed lettering, and contains 109 numbered catalogue entries.[26] Most (ninety-eight) are documents written predominantly in English; the other eleven are mainly works of poetry in Latin, Italian and French. Crucially for the present article, of the ninety-eight English-language documents, the catalogue describes the author or contents of twenty-five using the word 'mad' or a synonym (I use 'mad' here as a temporary shorthand, although I discuss terminology in more detail below); this is the largest thematic category. The second-largest thematic group is composed of 'requests' of one sort or another (twenty-one), followed by material relating to feuds (fifteen), and smaller clusters of material concerning forgery (eight), patronage (eight), trade (three), etc. Aside from the descriptions in the printed catalogue, there are three sets of annotations on the documents themselves: contemporary Elizabethan annotations; annotations in a seventeenth-century hand identified by Alexandra Walsham and Cecile Zinberg as belonging to the antiquarian John Strype; and nineteenth-century pencil markings made by the British Museum archivist.[27]

Table 1 summarises the descriptions of and annotations on the ninety-eight English Language documents in Lansdowne 99. Almost 80 per cent have sixteenth-century annotations, and almost 25 per cent of these describe the author or contents as 'mad'. Just over 20 per cent of the documents are annotated by Strype, and 75 per cent of these describe the author or contents as 'mad'. Strype's judgements do not always overlap with (or echo) those of Burghley and his secretariat. Only seven letters are labelled 'mad' by both Strype and Burghley's secretaries: an additional twelve are designated as such by Burghley's secretariat, and a further nine by Strype, making twenty-eight

[22] *Ibid.*, 2–169.
[23] *Ibid.*, 169–85 (quote at 169).
[24] *Ibid.*, 169–202.
[25] *Ibid.*, 202–66.
[26] Lansdowne 99; *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, 190–2.
[27] Alexandra Walsham, '"Frantick Hacket": Prophexy, Sorcery, Insanity, and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement', *The Historical Journal*, 41.1 (1998), 25 n. 111.

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Table 1. Descriptions of 98 English Language documents in BL MS Lansdowne 99

Provenance	Total annotations	'Mad' annotations
C19th (catalogue)	98	25
C19th (archivist)	28	26 ('silly')
C17th (John Strype)	21	16
C16th (Burghley or secretariat)	80	19
		Total number of documents with one or more 'mad' annotations: 57

documents altogether. The nineteenth-century catalogue identifies twenty-five letters as 'mad', and these judgements follow comments by Strype and/or the secretaries in most but not all instances.[28] In total, of the ninety-eight English Language letters in Lansdowne 99, the authors or contents of thirty-one are identified as 'mad' by one or more of Burghley's secretaries, Strype, or the nineteenth-century catalogue.

Lansdowne 99 has long been recognised as an unusual collection of material. Stephen Clucas described it as 'a collection of Burghley's papers which are effectively labelled "file under L for Lunatic"', while Kathryn Hodgkin referred to them as "'letters of several madmen"' and Alexandra Walsham characterised them as 'a remarkable collection of prophetic letters', noting 'whether a contemporary or some later individual grouped them together in this volume remains unclear'.[29] While in general, as C. S. Knighton notes, 'a catalogue of manuscripts deals with documents as they happen to be arranged', the grouping of the Lansdowne manuscripts may have taken place according to different principles. The cataloguing of the Burghley papers was carried out by the British Museum's troubled Keeper of the Manuscripts from 1807 to 1811, Francis Douce, in all likelihood according to the principles followed by his predecessor, Robert Nares. In the front matter to his catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, Nares explained that he had been working under a Royal Commission from George III to "'methodise, regulate, and digest the records, rolls, instruments, books and papers, in any of Our public offices and repositories"'.[30] The instruction to 'methodise, regulate, and digest' may well have resulted in a higher degree of archival

[28]Of these 25, 7 are the letters labelled as 'mad' by both Strype and the secretaries; 9 agree with the secretaries alone; 4 agree with Strype alone; and 3 are not labelled 'mad' by Strype or the secretaries.

[29]Stephen Clucas, "'This Paradoxall Restitution Iudaicall": The Apocalyptic Correspondence of John Dee and Roger Edwardes', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 42 (2012), 512; Katharine Hodgkin, *Madness in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (Basingstoke, 2007), 8–9; Walsham, "'Frantick Hacket"', 25 n. 111. Henry Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (3rd ser., III; 1846), 60, describes Lansdowne 99 as containing 'a considerable number of Letters addressed, some to the Queen and some to Lord Burghley, from lunatics'.

[30]'Commission for executing the Measures recommended by the House of Commons respecting the Public Records of the Kingdom', 19 July, 1800. Printed in front matter of *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters … Vol. I* (London, 1808). I am indebted to Professor Norman Jones for bringing this instruction to my attention.

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intervention in the cataloguing of Lansdowne 99 than might otherwise be expected.[31] It is interesting to note that of twenty-six occurrences of the words 'frantic', 'mad', 'distracted', 'crazy', 'deranged', 'insane' and 'madmen' across the entirety of the catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts, twenty (80 per cent) of the documents are in Lansdowne 99, with the remaining six documents scattered across five other volumes. This is a further strong indication that the material in Lansdowne 99 was deliberately grouped together by theme.

There are other clues which suggest that Douce may have significantly influenced the formation of the archive as we view it today. When the Leeds antiquarian Ralph Thoresby visited John Strype at his home in Low Leyton in 1709, he described seeing Strype's 'noble collection of original letters'.[32] Strype periodically sent documents to Thoresby to help build up his collection of sixteenth-century autographs, and he referred to his published work as 'a repository for many choice monuments of antiquity; which otherwise, being in loose papers and private studies, might in time be utterly extinguished and irrecoverably lost'.[33] Whilst in Strype's possession the Burghley papers were a loose collection of working letters and documents, and only Lansdowne MS volumes 115, 116 and 119 are specifically recorded as miscellanies 'of Mr Strype's collection'.[34] Somebody else seems to have made the decision to group and bind the material labelled 'mad' by Burghley's secretariat with the material labelled 'mad' by Strype himself.

There is a third collection of material within Lansdowne 99 which suggests that this grouping ultimately took place during the nineteenth-century cataloguing of the archive: a sequence of twenty-six documents (comprising most of Lansdowne 58–83) with annotations of the word 'silly', probably in the sense of 'foolish' or 'ridiculous', in pencil by a nineteenth-century hand.[35] The pencil foliation of Lansdowne 99 also suggests ongoing reordering and reorganisation of the documents to reflect the inclusion of late additions; towards the end of the volume, for example, a bold folio number 270 overwrites a faded 260 below a faded and struck-through 261 (Figure 1).[36]

This grouping of thematically related material, labelled 'mad' and 'silly' at three different times, taken together with the pencil annotations and the revisions of foliation, suggests that Douce may have taken his instruction to 'methodise, regulate, and digest' the Burghley papers to heart, perhaps in ways that reflected his own scholarly desire 'to illustrate the manners, customs, and beliefs ... of the common people' as well as his avowed 'liking for the odd, the sardonic, and the macabre'.[37]

[31] Again, I must thank Norman Jones for drawing out this implication in email correspondence with the author, dated 11 and 13 June 2024.

[32] Joseph Hunter (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby, Author of the Topography of Leeds, 1677–1724* (2 vols., 1830), II, 25, cited in Cecile Zinberg, 'John Strype and the Sixteenth Century Portrait of an Anglican Historian' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1968), 174.

[33] Zinberg, 'John Strype', 230.

[34] *Ibid.*, 175–7.

[35] Also 'lacking judgement or common sense', 'characterised by ridiculous or frivolous behaviour'. *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), s.v. 'silly (adj., n., & adv.)', December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4265967977, sense III.6.a [accessed 16 Jun. 2024].

[36] Lansdowne 99 fo. 270^{r}.

[37] C. Hurst, 'Douce, Francis (1757–1834), Antiquary and Collector'. Douce's personal collections contained 'scrap-books with such headings as "Anachronisms and Absurdities"': 'Francis Douce Centenary Number', *Bodleian Library Quarterly Record*, 7.81 (1934), 361.

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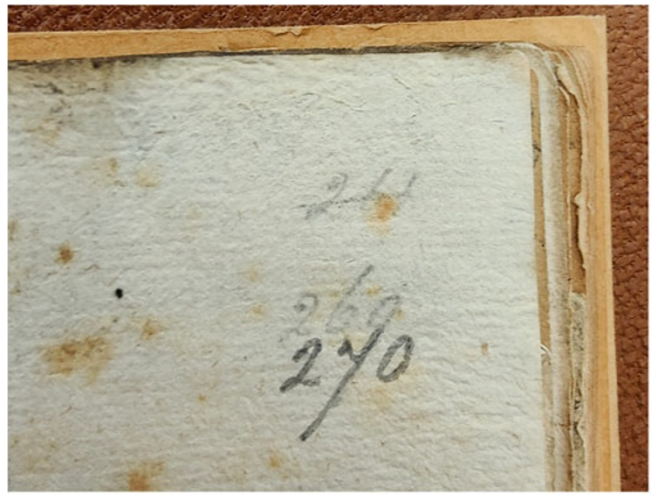

Figure 1. Evolving foliation in BL MS Lansdowne 99. From the British Library Collection: BL MS Lansdowne 99, fo. 270.

The exact process by which letters sent to the ruling authorities of Elizabethan England came to be ordered, preserved and catalogued in the modern archive remains foggy in some details. But as a result of these processes a collection of disparate material was formed into a corpus through the value-judgements of three sets of individuals: a sixteenth-century secretariat summarising and organising working documents for their master; a seventeenth-century antiquarian, responding to earlier assessments and contributing more of his own; and a nineteenth-century archivist with an interest in 'anachronisms and absurdities' and a commission to 'methodise, regulate and digest' the papers under his authority. It seems likely that Douce brought together the material annotated by the secretaries and by Strype with his own identification of 'silly' documents as one of the informal thematic miscellanies of dated material in Lansdowne MS vols 94–104. The result is a unique body of sources which presents the historian with substantial ethical and methodological challenges, but which I argue constitutes a significant corpus of material for revealing the experience and expression of 'distress' in Elizabethan England.[38]

In discussing the formation of the archive I have used the terminology of those describing its authors and contents as 'mad' as a temporary shorthand. But to what extent is it accurate, ethical or even helpful to characterise these authors as 'mad' when the only evidence of their 'madness' is a series of judgements made about the contents of their letters by external observers? There is a large and varied literature on early modern 'madness', which is undoubtedly a legitimate and revealing subject for historical investigation.[39] In this article, however, I propose taking a different approach

[38]See James Daybell, 'Archives', in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London, 2017), 126.

[39]E.g. Richard Neugebauer, 'Medieval and Early Modern Theories of Mental Illness', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 36.4 (1979), 477–8; Jerome Kroll, 'A Reappraisal of Psychiatry in the Middle Ages', *Archives*

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to the letters of Lansdowne 99, sidestepping problematic and anachronistic questions of medical classification and diagnosis, and analysing them through the lens of the history of emotions. This approach has the added advantage of being consonant with both modern and early modern understandings of the complex and porous relationships between emotion and mental illness.[40] Robert Burton, for example, in his compendious *Anatomy of Melancholy*, distinguished between melancholy proper and other diseases of the head and mind (including madness), but explained that ancient authorities were not unanimous on this point, and that functionally speaking madness and melancholy could be indistinguishable from one another.[41] Taking many of their cues from Burton, modern historians stress the humoral basis of early modern theories of emotion, and the widespread belief that mental states were shaped by the interaction and interrelation between physical and mental health.[42] Modern practitioners of 'neurohistory', in ways which recall pre-Cartesian models, similarly collapse the analytical boundaries between histories of emotion, mind, body and environment.[43]

Attempting to determine whether or not the authors of Lansdowne 99 were 'really mad' (and if so, the cause or nature of that 'madness') is therefore not the most helpful way to approach these letters. The history of the archive suggests that at least three sets of observers felt that the contents of the letters, or their authors, exhibited beliefs

of General Psychiatry, 29 (1973), 276–83; Joel Peter Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court* (New Haven, 1995); Wendy Turner, *Care and Custody of the Mentally Ill, Incompetent, and Disabled in Medieval England* (Turnhout, 2013); Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1981); Yasmin Haskell, *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period* (Turnhout, 2011); Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2007); Greg Eghigian, *From Madness to Mental Health: Psychiatric Disorder and its Treatment in Western Civilisation* (New Brunswick, 2010); Wendy Turner, *Care and Custody of the Mentally Ill, Incompetent, and Disabled in Medieval England* (Turnhout, 2013); Irina Metzler. *Fools and idiots?: Intellectual Disability in the Middle Ages* (Manchester, 2016); Vieda Skultans, *English Madness: Ideas on Insanity, 1580–1890* (London, 1979); H. C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford, 1999), 11; Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca, 2004); Jeremy Boulton and John Black, '"Those, that die by reason of their madness": Dying Insane in London, 1629–1830', *History of Psychiatry*, 23.1 (2012), 27–39; Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London, 1996).

[40]I use the modern terms as a convenient shorthand, although early moderns would have used the language of the passions, affections and madness.

[41]Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy What It Is: With all the Kindes, Causes, Symptoms, Prognostickes, and Several Cures of It …* (Oxford, 1621), STC2: 4159, sigs. f1^{r}, f4^{v}, 14.

[42]Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago, 2004); Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past and Present*, 191 (2006), 77–120; Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010); Brian Cummings and Freya Selderhuis (eds.), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (Farnham, 2013); Stephanie Shirilan, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (Ashgate, 2015); Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 2016).

[43]Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester, 2018), 133–5. See also Rob Boddice, 'The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future', *Revista de estudios sociales*, 62 (2017), 10–15; Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Cambridge, 2020); Lisa Feldman Barrett, 'The theory of constructed emotion: an active inference account of interoception and categorisation', *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 12.1 (2017), 1–23. See also https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response and https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm [accessed 31 Jan. 2024]. Cf. Rob Ellis, Sarah Kendal and Steven J. Taylor (eds.), *Voices in the history of madness: personal and professional perspectives on mental health and illness* (Basingstoke, 2021).

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or behaviours extreme enough to warrant accusations of 'madness'. Indeed, in order to convey a flavour of these historical judgements, and a sense of the formation and character of the archive, I occasionally quote their descriptors in the following discussion. However, attempting to 'diagnose' the Lansdowne 99 authors, according either to modern or early modern understandings of mental illness, would for the reasons given above be methodologically and ethically problematic.[44] Focusing on the emotional content of the letters of Lansdowne 99 allows us to step outside of the usual contexts of histories of 'madness' (medical, clinical or institutional settings) to take a wider look at the phenomenon of emotional distress.[45] The Oxford English Dictionary offers a helpful definition of distress, one which was in use in early modern England, as 'the sore pressure or strain of adversity, trouble, sickness, pain, or sorrow; anguish or affliction affecting the body, spirit, or community'.[46] This emphasis on feeling and experience rather than pathology is a fruitful one, allowing the researcher to adopt a stance of conceptual constructive ambiguity. Such a stance facilitates analysis by allowing the researcher to simultaneously acknowledge and explore distress whilst refraining from attempting to pathologise it.

'Distress' was ubiquitous in late-sixteenth-century England. As a crude but indicative metric, more than 1,350 works published between 1560 and 1600 referenced 'distress' according to the EEBO/TCP database of early modern English texts.[47] 'Distress' could result from or find expression in physical, spiritual, or psychological circumstances. In the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton discussed the distress of 'miserable wretches' brought to penury through addiction to gaming and other pleasures, as well as the potential for 'scurrile jests, flouts, and Sarcasmes' to cause emotional harm to people in distress, and the potential of philosophy to 'settle a distressed mind'.[48] Early modern authors also wrote extensively about the spiritual causes of and remedies for distress. In his exposition of the Apostle's Creed, the Calvinist divine William Perkins explained that 'when any man is in distresse, he should have recourse to the right meanes of comfort, namely the word & sacraments, & there he shall find the assistance of the holy ghost'.[49] The physician Thomas Twyne, in his *garlande of godly flowers*, provided a model prayer for the godly, to 'looke down into the bottome

[44]E.g. in contrast to Nigel Bark, 'Did Schizophrenia Change the Course of English History? The Mental Illness of Henry VI', *Medical Hypotheses*, 59.4 (2002), 416–21; P. F. Cranefield, 'A 17th Century View of Mental Deficiency and Schizophrenia: Thomas Willis on "Stupidity or Foolishness"', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 35 (1961), 291–316.

[45]Pilloud and Louis-Courvoisier similarly ague for the value of first-person accounts of (physical) illness 'specifically expressed and interpreted by the sufferers themselves': 'The Intimate Experience of the Body', 454. See also Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness*; Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

[46]"Distress, N., Sense I.2.a." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford, December 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1200992311.

[47]https://www.proquest.com/eebo/advanced [accessed 8 Apr. 2025], search was for 'distress' 'Anywhere', 1560–1600. There was also a common legal sense of the word, 'the action of distraining', both the seizure of a chattel and the chattels seized by this process, which account for a significant proportion of these results: "Distress, N., Sense II." Oxford English Dictionary, December 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4215080827. More detailed linguistic analysis of the term may yield interesting results, but is beyond the scope of this article.

[48]Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 157, 198, 354.

[49]William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (1595), STC2: 19703, 349.

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and deapth of my conscience, and consider the perpetual afflictions which daily I sustayne therin, to the daungerous distresse, & wonderful woundyng of the same'.[50] Nine of the BL Lansdowne MS 99 authors self-identified as 'distressed' in relation to their circumstances: it is not a large interpretative leap to take the broader corpus of letters as providing significant evidence not of 'madness', but rather of profound distress.[51]

These letters offer a fresh, distinctive and immediate perspective on how those in distress saw the world, anchored themselves within it, and mobilised appeals for aid in relation to a series of reservoirs of social and cultural meaning. James Daybell and Andrew Gordan have cautioned that early modern letters are 'a highly self-reflexive form in which we find not merely textual instances of the construction of the self, but an acute sensitivity to the cultures and practices of letter writing and a self-conscious creativity in the manipulation of these epistolary tools'.[52] But if letters are not simply windows into men's (or women's) souls, neither are they entirely unhelpful in revealing past emotion. Neurohistory offers a potentially helpful way to help square the circle: if all human feeling is mediated through culture, then the quest to separate out 'authentic experience' from 'conventional formulae' is doomed from the outset, as the former cannot exist independently of, but is at least partly created through, the latter.[53] Of further relevance is the suggestion by Peter Goldie that humans make sense of their lives through 'narrative thinking', by which events are shaped and organised, giving coherence, structure and meaning to the content which is being narrated.[54] All narratives contain fictionalising tendencies, and as such present a means to understand the ways in which people encounter and make sense of experience.[55]In the same vein, Natalie Zemon Davis has observed that 'fiction' can be taken to mean the ways in which historical subjects crafted narratives.[56] And as Linda Pollock has suggested, 'private documents' allow historians 'to investigate the lived experience of emotions, as well as the intersection between individual choice and cultural scripts'.[57] Although literary constructions written with a specific audience in mind, letters are imbued with their authors' sense of structure, coherence, meaning and emotional import. Despite their difficulties, they remain vital evidence of their authors' experience of emotion,

[50]Thomas Twyne, *The Garlande of Godly Flowers Bewtifully Adorned* (1574), STC2: 24408, sig. C1^{r}.

[51]The letters which use the term are BL Lansdowne MSS nos. 16, 17, 60, 67, 69, 77, 79, 81, 82.

[52]Daybell and Gordon, 'Introduction', 1–3. See also James Daybell, 'Recent Studies in Sixteenth-Century Letters', *English Literary Renaissance*, 35.2 (2005), 135–70; James Daybell, 'Recent Studies in Seventeenth-Century Letters', *English Literary Renaissance*, 36.1 (2006), 331–62; Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009); James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012); Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2016); Sarah Goldsmith, Sheryllynne Haggerty and Karen Harvey (eds.), *Letters and the Body, 1700–1830: Writing and Embodiment* (New York, 2023).

[53]Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, ch. 4, 'Beings Human'.

[54]Peter Goldie, *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, and the Mind* (Oxford, 2012), ix, 4, 8.

[55]*Ibid.*, 56, 160–8.

[56]Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 1987), 3.

[57]Linda Pollock, 'Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 47.3 (2004), 571.

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and the ways in which those experiences were informed by wider webs of language, culture and belief.

In discussing the authors and letters of BL Lansdowne MS 99, I illuminate commonalities in emotional expression across the corpus as a whole while remaining sensitive to the nuances of individual subjectivities.[58] Carolyn James has noted that humble people's petitions to wealthy patrons 'constitute an important, if underutilised, resource for understanding how the poor and powerless represented themselves and sought to elicit sympathy from those who could help them', and I use distress as a critical prism, refracting the perception, experience, construction and expression of emotion *in extremis* for a diverse group of Elizabethan subjects.[59] In what remains I demonstrate that several recurring themes predominate in such cases, reinforcing our understanding of the extent to which distress was socially, culturally and historically constructed. Understanding their distress brings us to a richer understanding of the core anxieties which suffused Elizabethans' attitudes to the world and their place within it. [60]

Experiencing and expressing distress

When Roger Crimble, with whom this article began, wrote to Queen Elizabeth I he called on her for aid, confident that she would take 'pitie of my poore estate' and 'give me those things that are needfull'.[61] When Austin Metcalf wrote to Lord Burghley in 1590, he asked him to move the queen to give him money 'towards meat drinck Clothinge ... in the waie of pittie'.[62] The offer of William Hobby, 'a pore subjecte of the Quenes', to remove 'a dyvell and his Dame' from Skenfrith castle was on the condition that he would be allowed to keep the 'hogshedd of gold' and 'hogshedd of sylver' on which they sat; or else 'then I will look for some other thinge at your handes'.[63] In keeping with Hickes' responsibility for patronage, almost all of the letters in Lansdowne 99 adopt a petitioning tone, requesting material aid, financial help, or making some other kind of bargain or demand.[64] Petitioning was endemic in early modern England, and the Crown was a popular target for petitioners across the period.[65] In the emotional extremity of their requests, language and framing, the distressed authors of

[58]Lyndal Roper, 'Beyond Discourse Theory', *Women's History Review*, 19.2 (2020), 312.

[59]Carolyn James, 'Letters', in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Suan Broomhall (2017), 121.

[60]See the definition of the term 'Mentalité, N.', Oxford English Dictionary, July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7787053545 [accessed 2 Feb. 2024]

[61]Lansdowne 99 n. 17, fo. 45^{r}.

[62]Lansdowne 99 n. 14, fo. 32^{r}.

[63]Lansdowne 99 n. 11, fo. 27^{r}.

[64]Hannan, *Women of Letters*, 1.

[65]Brodie Waddell, 'Petitions in Early Modern England: A Very Short Introduction', *The Power of Petitioning in Seventeenth Century England*, https://petitioning.history.ac.uk/blog/2019/06/petitions-in-early-modern-england-a-very-short-introduction/ (2019) [accessed 4 Aug. 2023]. AHRC Project Reference AH/S001654/1. Cf. https://petitioning.history.ac.uk/blog/2019/05/petitioning-in-early-modern-england-an-annotated-bibliography/, [accessed 4 Aug. 2023]; David Coast, 'Speaking for the People in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 44 (2019), 51–88; Peter Lake, 'Puritans, Popularity and Petitions: Local Politics in National Context, Cheshire, 1641′, in *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell*, ed. Thomas Cogswell, Richard Cust and Peter Lake (Cambridge, 2002), 259–89.

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Lansdowne 99 occasionally went beyond the standard rhetorical and generic expectations of petitioning, but generally in degree rather than kind. In some ways they were akin to the early seventeenth-century case, explored by David Cressy, of Lucy Martin. Martin, who wrapped a letter around a stone and threw it at Charles I in 1626, was subsequently interrogated, and for Cressy her responses revealed both 'the national mission of a prophetess and the personal needs of a deeply disturbed woman'.[66] Like Martin, the Lansdowne authors deserve 'attention, not just as an arresting anecdote, but as a point of entry for exploring the social and religious complexities' of the late-Tudor era.

The Lansdowne letters show us that, unsurprisingly, one of the most common features of distress in Elizabethan England was that individuals felt weak and powerless. Emphasising their helplessness also functioned as a rhetorical strategy to improve their chances of receiving aid. Susan Broomhall has described a rhetoric of 'persuasive poverty' in women's pauper letters in sixteenth-century Tours, while Carolyn James and Jessica O'Leary have observed that early modern letter-writing manuals encouraged authors 'to tug at the heart, or the purse strings', in order to elicit the desired response.[67] Miles Fry, judged by Strype to be 'distempred in his wytts', explained to Burghley that he was 'in great extremity and redi to perish for lak of helpe', threatening 'yf you do not presentli helpe me ... I shal end my life'.[68] In a letter of 1588, William Darbishere wrote to Cecil that he had lived a loyal and honourable life, which through no fault of his own 'hath brought me to some disgrace with no lesse lost of my living or maintenance'. Darbishere's father had died in debt, and in return for aid he made Cecil an unusual offer: his 'dewtifull service' as 'your honors secretery for the keeping of lies or writings not fit to be known by any others'.[69] Robert Bushel, again labelled 'distempered' by Strype, approached Burghley in 1596, ostensibly to complain about 'the price of corn & all other vetles', claiming that god had 'brought me out of such dangirs as all thee world could not do', but bemoaning that he was 'kept from all outward means' and was 'com for the savgard of my life & for them which god hath sent me as my wife & vij christians'.[70] Such pleas emphasise that individual authors' distress almost inevitably arose from straitened circumstances: often marginalised and desperate, they lacked the potential for redress through any other systems of support.

The Lansdowne 99 letters share some similarities with the later genre of 'pauper letters' examined by historians of modern Britain.[71] Individuals used such letters to prove and negotiate their eligibility for poor relief, demonstrating a sense of entitlement and

[66]David Cressy, *Charles I and the People of England* (Oxford, 2015), 1–6.

[67]Susan Broomhall, '"Burdened with Small Children": Women Defining Poverty in Sixteenth-Century Tours', in *Women's Letters Across Europe 1400–1700*, J. Couchman and A. Crabb (Aldershot, 2005), 229–34; Carolyn James and Jessica O'Leary, 'Letter-Writing and Emotions', in *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe 1100–1700*, ed. Susan Broomhall and Andrew Lynch (Abingdon, 2019), 263.

[68]Lansdowne 99 n. 6, fo. 13^{r}. For an actual case of a suicide of a Lansdowne 99 author seeLansdowne 99 n. 32, fo. 88^{r}; Charles Angell Bradford, 'William Dodington: A Tragedy of St. Sepulchre's, Holborn, in 1600', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, n.s. 7 (1933), 124–32.

[69]Lansdowne 99 n. 7, fo. 14^{r}.

[70]Lansdowne 99 n. 18, fo. 50^{r}.

[71]Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s–1830s* (London, 2019); Thomas Sokoll (ed.), *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837* (Oxford, 2001); Thomas Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London, 1800–1834', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000), 19–46; Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Olwen

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a shared belief across the social spectrum that the wealthy were obliged to provide for those who were deserving and in need.[72] Scholarship emphasises that these letters were strategic documents as well as 'in essence truthful scripts of experience', 'simultaneously documents of record, negotiation, rhetoric and strategy'.[73] In her powerful critique of the limits of discourse analysis, Lyndal Roper has argued that we need to be alert to the ways in which historical subjects drew on familiar elements of discourse 'in unusual ways, striving to express a particularly quality of experience' in order to 'do justice to the somatic and emotional experiences of people in the past'.[74] The vast majority of Lansdowne 99 authors sought to demonstrate their deservingness, asserting a strong sense of worthiness alongside an expectation that the authorities were duty-bound to come to their aid. Prominent in this largely male sample was a masculine tendency in the narration of deservingness to emphasise dependants – wives and children who relied on them for care and protection. In 1591, a minister named 'Johnson' referenced his 'wyfe and … Children of which I am deprived', and in 1588 the supplicant Henry Cottismore wrote 'he is utterly undone not having wherewith to releeve his poore infantes but is already constreined to pawne the cloke from his back to nourish them'.[75] For William Renolds, described as 'a person distracted' by Burghley's secretariat, it was for the relief of his 'mother now also apore widowe, who dayly weepes in her distresse' that he sought aid, 'that I may clothe her which has clothed me, that I may refreshe & comfort her which comfertid me'.[76]

Not all supplicants had dependants, but another common technique to establish deservingness amongst the distressed was to fall back on extreme professions of loyalty, notwithstanding the fact that formulaic pleasantries were part and parcel of correspondence with such illustrious patrons.[77] Thomas Woodhouse, the first Catholic priest to be executed during the reign of Elizabeth I, began his letter to William Cecil in 1572 fawningly:

> your Lordshipe Wyll peradventure marvell at my bouldnes that dare preseume to interpell your wisdom beynge occupied in so great and Weyghtye affayres towchinge the state of the whole realme. How be yt I have conceived that opynyon of your Lordshipes humanytie that ye wyll not contempne any mans goodes wyll how … meane so ever he be …[78]

Purdue, '"Please Pardon Me for Taking the Liberty": Poverty Letters as Negotiating Spaces in 1920s and 1930s Belfast and Dublin', *Cultural and Social History*, 19.2 (2022), 1–19.

[72]See Tim Hitchcock, 'A New History from Below', *History Workshop Journal*, 57.1 (2004), 297; Steve Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', *Past and Present*, 172 (2001), 44–86.

[73]Earner-Byrne and Purdue, '"Please Pardon Me for Taking the Liberty"', 2; Steven King, 'Constructing the Body in English Pauper Letters, 1780–1834′, in *Letters and the Body, 1700–1830: Writing and Embodiment*, ed. Sarah Goldsmith, Sheryllynne Haggerty and Karen Harvey (New York, 2023), 193. See also Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living', 29.

[74]Roper, 'Beyond Discourse Theory', 311.

[75]Lansdowne 99 n. 13, fo. 31^{r}; Lansdowne 99 n. 50, fo. 143^{r}.

[76]Lansdowne 99 n. 31, fo. 85^{v}.

[77]James and O'Leary, 'Letter-Writing and Emotions', 258.

[78]Lansdowne 99 n. 1, fo. 1^{r}.

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Woodhouse's biographer records that Cecil summoned Woodhouse to him a few days later, at which point, his pleas unheard, the priest 'refused to recognise any of Cecil's titles'.[79] The prodigious William Renolds wrote to Cecil in 1588, signing off:

> Right honnorable I do most humbly besech your honnor ... I will be Rewlid as your honnor shall commaund me ... I do not a lyckell Rejoyse to conseve yet so much good ment and most humbly uppon my knes giving her majesti, and all your honnores most humble thanckes praying to God for your happiness and desiring god to make me able to desearve your honnors good willes and that he would make me able to do some servis to my Prinse and Cunttery that your eyes or eares may se or hear the same ...[80]

Such effusiveness proceeded from these authors' distress and their straitened circumstances, while simultaneously functioning as a deliberate rhetorical strategy to secure aid.[81]

The fact that the queen herself (or her most trusted councillor) was a natural source of help of last resort for distressed subjects in Elizabethan England tells us something about Elizabeth's relationship with her people, and the extent to which she loomed large in the popular imagination. In his biography of Elizabeth I, Christopher Haigh makes brief mention of one of the Lansdowne 99 authors we have already met, Miles Fry, 'a madman ... who called himself "Emmanuel Plantagenet"' and claimed to be the son of God and the Queen. For Haigh, this was an example of how 'the official image of Elizabeth as virgin mother of her people also seems to have been effective – even if it was taken too literally by some.'[82] In a tangentially related phenomenon, Carole Levin has documented a range of Elizabethan subjects who dreamed about the queen and wrote to her to express their fears for her, while Louis Adrian Montrose has argued that such dreams allow us 'to glimpse the cultural contours of an Elizabethan psyche'.[83] Fry's astonishing claim to be 'an embassador from god the father unto the quenes highness to declare unto her that I am the sonne of them both' was a particularly extreme example of a broader tendency by which Elizabeth was embraced by her subjects as their temporal and spiritual guardian.[84] In less treasonous vein, Roger Crimble framed Elizabeth as 'Christes spowse his testament his deputie the trew mother of the trew Church of Englande and Ireland, whereof I doe Come as one of your poore sonnes'.[85] The radical antinomian Robart Banister, described by Strype as 'a Religious Mad-man', appended a poem to a pair of letters to Elizabeth beginning 'O mother of

[79]Thomas M. McCoog, 'Woodhouse, Thomas (d. 1573)', *ODNB*. McCoog notes of Woodhouse that 'many thought him mad', perhaps explaining why his letter ended up in Lansdowne 99.

[80]Lansdowne 99 n. 10, fo. 22^{v}.

[81]Cf. Lansdowne 99 n. 57, fo. 157^{r}.

[82]Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I: Profiles in Power* (2nd edn, Harlow, 1998), 161.

[83]Carole Levin, *'The Heart and Stomach of a King': Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia, 1994), 149–64; Louis Adrian Montrose, '"Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations*, 2 (1983), 63.

[84]Lansdowne 99 n. 6, fo. 13^{r}.

[85]Lansdowne 99 n. 17, fo. 45^{r}.

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marcy, with pitty, extende to see the ende, christis gospel to defende', *en passant* ascribing to Elizabeth the traditional Catholic image of the Virgin Mary as Mother of Mercy.[86] He explained how he, 'a faithful subject & True Christian', was 'forsed to flye to your loving aide as to safe haven', ending 'O gracious Lady, save a poore Lambe from the pause of many lions'.[87] In an undated letter, Roger Walles, described by Burghley's secretariat as 'some concipted person as it seems fantasticall', tried to demonstrate his loyalty to Elizabeth by claiming that 'as god hath appointed me I have saved your graces lyffe once all Redey and will do agayne yf I maye com to your graces presents'.[88] Such language demonstrates that the powerful political and religious discourses of Elizabeth as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Virgin Queen, and mother of her people, had significant and enduring popular resonance, shaping and colouring the distress of the petitioners of Lansdowne 99, inflecting their petitions to the government, and raising hopes that she would offer maternal care and protection.

Many of the Lansdowne 99 authors went beyond describing desperate circumstances and demonstrating deservingness and loyalty to reveal more sinister and frightening interpretations of their predicaments. Their letters suggest that the experience and expression of distress was frequently framed in relation to a sense of victimhood – a fear of persecution or danger which could be personal, national or even cosmic in nature. Some of those who articulated a sense of persecution did so in relation to protestations to clear their names from false accusations and ill fame. Historians have long recognised the importance of reputation and credit in early modern English society.[89] So powerful was the impulse to demonstrate social worth and trustworthiness that it appears to have coloured the experience and expression of distress to a considerable degree, especially amongst the predominantly male Lansdowne 99 authors, with Alexandra Shepard noting that 'men's reputations were most frequently attacked through questioning their economic integrity in terms of plain dealing, reliability and personal worth'.[90] When the Gravesend customs official William Darby sent his petition to the queen, labelled 'silly' by Douce and 'strange and incoherent' by the Lansdowne catalogue, not only was he 'compelled of very nede to besech your Majestie to be good unto me as one destitute of relief & favor', he was also explicit that 'that I haue not byn acquainted with any thing in the world prejudiciall to any person much lesse to hinder your Majesties proffitt'.[91] Suspected of financial malpractice, Darby protested that 'if there be anything in the world that may touch me in creditt, I may be admitted to the answere thereof for my dischardg'. In 1587, Thomas Silvester, described as 'a fantasticall, or distracted person' by Strype, wrote to Burghley to object to his banishment from court 'for speaking the truth'. His sentence, he exclaimed, was 'very harde and a thing that the quenes Eniemyes

[86]Or *Mater Misericordiae*. See Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (2009), 155–6.

[87]Lansdowne 99 n. 4, fo. 9^{v}. See also Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485–1625* (Cambridge, 2017), 204–6.

[88]Lansdowne 99 n. 25, fo. 69^{r}.

[89]E.g. Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998); Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2015).

[90]Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 164.

[91]Lansdowne 99 n. 69, fo. 180^{r}; *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, 192.

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may Laught at and amene to in Curredge them to pretend more mischief'.[92] He denied libel and violence, praying 'that I may Receive a beter Reward then banishment for my Dutifull service'. One of the most common ways in which this group of distressed individuals rationalised their misfortune and attempted to narrate their innocence and deservingness was in reference to wrongs and slanders suffered at the hands of others.

Sometimes the victimisation authors reported was reputational, as documented above, but in these narratives malice could take on a wider range of forms. William Barlee, who with his son was responsible for a total of eight letters in Lansdowne 99, first wrote to Burghley in 1589 demanding money from the Attorney General in recompense for unspecified 'losses', or else he threatened to make a 'publike example' of him.[93] This first letter, characterised as 'strange' by Strype and 'apparently insane' by the Lansdowne catalogue, obscured the full extent of Barlee's murky financial situation, because a series of further missives sent in 1592 identified both William and his son Thomas as prisoners in the Fleet. Barlee presented himself as an advocate for imprisoned 'distressed' souls desirous of suing 'villanous Conspirators'.[94] In particular, he explained, '(pressed) prisoners, doo (hartelie) wishe To have (Rigorous) lawes: (Towchinge, (hard dealing) Creditors: and, Concernynge those, (obstinate) offenders:)'. Barlee named individuals deserving immediate arrest for their predatory practices, and emphasised the impact of inmates' incarceration with reference to 'theire (sorrowfull) wyves, & (poore) Chiuldren', a further example of the role of dependants in the narration of deservingness.[95] Financial rapacity was also the concern of Henry Carter, described as 'distracted' by Burghley's secretariat and 'crazy' by the Lansdowne catalogue. Carter claimed to be a servant of William Stanley, Sixth Earl of Derby, and wrote to Burghley 'pittefully complening' about one Richard Handforth, 'A very bade member in this Coman welth … a descencion sower amongst his pouer nighboures A drunkerd A fornicator A forsworne man by his owne Confession And wellknowen to be a willfull morderer' who 'by his welth overronnes Everye man to the great Hurte of his pouer neighboures in thirsting after ther inosente bloudes'.[96] From the perspective of the distressed, financial misfortune and personal injustice could become wrapped up with animosity and moral judgement to fuel a powerful sense of persecution, helping to explain misfortune as uncharacteristic and undeserved.

The case of the Barlees also highlights a sad reality that many of the Lansdowne authors wrote from prison or having had experience of imprisonment, underlining their position (if only temporarily) on the social margins, and indicating that a familiar modern correlation between straitened circumstances, emotional distress and incarceration may have held true for Elizabethan England.[97] When the 'poore distressed

[92]Lansdowne 99 n. 8, fo. 16[r].

[93]Lansdowne 99 n. 2, fo. 3[r].

[94]Lansdowne 99 n. 16, fo. 38[r]. For the later seventeenth century, over a period of four years one in every twenty-seven householders spent time in prison for debt: Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*, 242, 282.

[95]Lansdowne 99 n. 16, fo. 39[r].

[96]Lansdowne 99 n. 20, fo. 53[r]; *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts*, 190.

[97]A Centre for Mental Health report commissioned by NHS England and conducted summer 2020 found that 45 per cent of adult prisoners had a diagnosis of depression or anxiety: https://www.

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suppliant' Helen Lee wrote to Burghley, she explained that she had been involved in legal suits for seven years across some of the most powerful courts in Tudor England. Lee, described as 'silly' by Douce and 'a mad woman' by the Lansdowne catalogue, had been 'this viij weekes in the gatehouse at westminster', another London prison. Lee's two letters to Burghley were written in different hands, suggesting that different scribes had penned them on her behalf. Like the Barlees' and Carter's, her letter evidenced significant financial hardship, 'she havinge bin putt to sell her smockes for the safegarde of her lief from famishementes'. Her financial and legal misfortunes formed but a mild prelude to the shocking main claim of her letter: the accusation that one Edwarde Roste:

> did caste me in a deade sleepe then putt me in a /sacke <baskett> puttinge me oute att the toppe of [the] howse intendinge to carrye me to drowne me in the Thames hadd not god prevented theire evill purpose and to that ende tyed a stone aboute … that I shoulde sinckes & have maymed my arme that I cannot have the use of it …[98]

Lee's desperate letter ended with the acknowledgement that 'I goo adread of my life night and day for christes sake'.[99]

The religious radical Robert Banister and prophetic William Renolds also spent time in prison and spoke in strong terms about their persecution. Writing in 1578, Banister complained that he 'hath bin greatly wronged, with longe imprisonment, in bridewell, only to defame me'. To Banister the identity of his enemies was crystal clear: he was tormented 'from the great envy of … the presies puritantes … that do in all places of your dominions, pervuate youre highness subjectes from all obedience'.[100] These unnamed puritans had not only 'malishiously & very slanderously' written against Banister, but 'they caused me to be laide in prison, for on of the phamily of lewde love', an antinomian sect inspired by the Dutch mystic Henrik Nikalaes which came to prominence in England from the mid-1570s.[101] Banister promised Elizabeth that he could reveal hidden religious truths and profound alchemical discoveries and was desperate to publish his writings, but had been falsely defamed and subsequently imprisoned.[102] In the fissile religious underworld of Elizabethan London, where individuals at the fringes of radical puritanism generated hostile antinomian critiques of the theological and devotional emphases of orthodox Calvinism, the broad outlines of Banister's

centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/future-prison-mental-health-care-england & https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/download/CentreforMentalHealth_TheFutureofPrisonMentalHealthCare_0.pdf [accessed 7 Aug. 2023].

[98]Lansdowne 99 n. 82, fo. 206^{r}. 'Caste' is probably meant in the sense of a violent assault. *OED*, 'Cast', Dec. 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7959889780 [accessed 21 Feb. 2024].

[99]Lansdowne 99 n. 82, fo. 204^{v}. Cf. the letter of Elnor Lee in 1595, who also wrote that 'shee is very day in great daunger of her lyfe by her adversaries who doe moleste and trouble her': Lansdowne 99 n. 65, fo. 172^{r}.

[100]Lansdowne 99 n. 4, fo. 8^{r}.

[101]See Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society* (Cambridge, 1994).

[102]Lansdowne 99 n. 4, fo. 8^{r}.

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position are familiar.[103] But the extremity of his sense of persecution stands out as noteworthy.

So does that of William Renolds. Renolds wrote more than 20,000 words across half a dozen letters surviving across the English state papers, predominantly in Lansdowne 99. In them, he recounted the conspiracy of his alleged enemies 'to take more advantage against me to trouble me, and to commit me to pryson, as once they did to new gate by adevise 6 yeares … and to the tower abowte 3 eares agoe, and to the marsheallsea abowte a eare ago'.[104] Over the space of a decade, Renolds had spent time in three major London prisons. Writing to the Privy Council, he alleged 'great treasons' amongst many of the central figures of the Tudor establishment, including Sir Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Sir Francis Walsingham; and Sir Christopher Hatton. By his later letters he seemed to hold particular animus against Burghley himself, writing (in reference to the 1570 portrait of Burghley riding a mule): 'I saw your picture once in a cham-ber, whear you are fayerly made riding uppon an ase … your ase has littell offendid but in going to fast & kicking pore suters when ther tayles shuld be heard'.[105] While Banister's and Renolds's letters are amongst the most dramatic examples, overall the Lansdowne 99 correspondence reveals a group of individuals suffering extreme distress during periods of great pain, hardship and desperation, some of whom experienced spells in prison, and many of whom interpreted their misfortune with reference to allegations of persecution by enemies known and unknown.

Some authors wrote to Burghley and the queen to communicate equally immediate but less personal threats, including dangers faced by the entire kingdom. William Paget[106] wrote to Burghley in 1583, recounting various 'revelacions & Devinacions', during which 'terrible movinges in the aire of Fyrrye Flashes' had presaged 'gret murders and troobles', including the 1569 Northern Rebellion. Paget had recently seen over London 'a Fyry Canapy or tent open in the tope & stremeing Flashes coming from most partes about it', taking it as a sign of 'gret troobls'.[107] His main concern was the military threat of Spain, who hungered to 'reveng and overthrow this Land'. The schoolmaster and Latinist Christopher Ocland similarly wrote a letter (labelled 'fantastical' by Strype) to Burghley in 1587 to warn against the sea voyage of Thomas Cavendish.[108] Ocland had won official recognition for his patriotic Latin poetry, but

[103]Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, 204–6; cf. David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, 2004).

[104]Lansdowne 99 n. 31, fo. 85^{v}.

[105]*Ibid*., fo. 82^{v}.

[106]Not the famous William, First Baron Paget, who died in 1563, or his eponymous grandson, the Fourth Baron, born in 1572. He could have been the William Paget who matriculated from Trinity College Cambridge in 1577/8 or the William Paget who made a will in 1589, but his identity is uncertain: https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2018.pl?sur=&suro=w&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=PGT577W&sye=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50 [accessed 8 Aug. 2023]; National Archives PROB 11/76/9.

[107]Lansdowne 99 n. 36, fos. 94^{r-v}.

[108]Lansdowne 99 n. 12, fo. 28^{r}. On Ocland see Ross Kennedy, 'Ocland, Christopher (d. in or after 1590)', *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20495. Cf. Susan M. Maxwell, 'Cavendish, Thomas (bap. 1560, d. 1592)', *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4942.

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by 1589 was penniless, and in 1590 wrote to Burghley as 'yower poor and infortunate *Christopher*', having accrued so much debt that 'my labor wyll not fynde me bread and drynck'.[109] Ocland's example, like Roger Crimble's, shows that people could drift in and out of periods of hardship and distress, and that desperate circumstances and emotions could afflict those of any station or education.[110] A letter of 1583 to Burghley and Secretary Walsingham from John Payne, described by Strype as 'a puritan minister ... very zealous against popery & prelacy', inveighed against the Catholic threat at home. Payne wrote: 'I wyll pray for the increase of your honorable corrage against suche lurckyng & Detected papistes, as under fayre semblans may labor styll to Dygg at the roote, to stryke at the braunches, & to overthrow religion'.[111] Roger Edwards, described as 'a religious madman' by Strype and whose apocalyptic writings have been examined by Steven Clucas, wrote to Burghley in 1579, pleading to meet with him 'to amplifie ... upon the high mysteries of God'.[112] This was an urgent matter, because 'the lorde [hath] unriveted all the Spheres: and from this daye forth shall hee make a shorte worke upon earth'. Apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs were widespread in early modern England, and on the one hand Edwards appears to have been using his revelations quite deliberately as a lever to persuade Burghley to meet with him.[113] On the other, such extreme fears represented the broadest possible manifestation of distress in the face of impending threat.

A number of the distressed Lansdowne 99 authors sought to establish their honourable and deserving status (as well as make sense of their parlous and persecuted state) through reference to family and dynastic connections. Alexandra Walsham has argued that 'the fascination with lineage, birth, blood, and descent that was a hallmark of the Tudor and Stuart elite ... stretched further down into English society than we have hitherto realised'.[114] It is then no surprise that the distressed authors of Lansdowne 99 frequently resorted to lineage as a tool to construct, narrate and inhabit a sense of their legitimacy and connectedness to the wider social fabric, both for their own reassurance and for the recipients of their letters.

Early modern family trees could 'trace lineages that were tenuous, if not spurious and fictitious', and in some of the Lansdowne 99 letters genealogies strayed into the downright fantastical. Miles Fry, as we have seen, claimed to be the result of a union between God and Queen Elizabeth I. On that basis he claimed that 'my autoriti is greater then [the angel] gabriels: I am the soonne he is but a servant', despite

[109]Kennedy, 'Ocland, Christopher'; Lansdowne vol. 65 n. 55, fo. 154^{r}; *Original Letters of Eminent Literary Men of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Henry Ellis (Camden Society, 1843), 73–4.

[110]Cf. Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy*, 87.

[111]Lansdowne 99 n. 5, fo. 10^{r}.

[112]Clucas, '"This paradoxall Restitution Iudaicall"', 509–18; Lansdowne 99 n. 3, fo. 6^{r}.

[113]E.g. Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (1978); Katherine Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford, 1979).

[114]Alexandra Walsham, *Generations: Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations* (Oxford, 2023), 172. See also Clive Holmes and Felicity Heal, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (1994), 22; Mervyn James, *Family, Lineage and Civil Society: A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region, 1500–1640* (Oxford, 1974), especially the Conclusion; Françoise Zonabend, *The Enduring Memory: Time and History in a French Village* (Manchester, 1986), 142.

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which he had 'not the favor of a subject' in his mother's realm.[115] Equally extraordinary was the case of Robert Mantle, who in 1580 was examined for claiming to be the deceased King Edward VI. His interrogators concluded that 'he useth many vayne and ydle Speeches as though he were a Lunaticke person'.[116] Prior to his examination Mantle had been held at Colchester gaol, but in 1579 he escaped. After being re-apprehended the Privy Council ordered his incarceration at Newgate until the time of the next meeting of the Essex assizes, where the justices were 'to proceade to his execucion'.[117]

Claims to royal status not only stretched credulity but were dangerous for their potential impact on the political stability of an Elizabethan state with an unmarried queen and no clear heir to the throne. Other correspondents within Lansdowne 99 wrote with less destabilising but equally incredible accounts of noble lineage. Hugh Russhe, described by the Lansdowne catalogue as 'a frantic man', wrote to Burghley to plead the restoration of his inheritance, for despite his poverty he claimed to be 'from Noble Parents discendid'. Russhe asserted that his parents had died when he was young, but that he had found out the truth of his status after discovering documents revealing a sinister conspiracy, beginning with a series of murders. The noble parents of the infant Russhe were killed, and he claimed to have been in the subsequent keeping of several individuals who were all assassinated for their role in concealing him, culminating with Lady Catherine Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, who famously went into exile during the reign of Mary I: according to Russhe, however, that she 'went oversee that I can not believe for they did morder her in Hereford'.[118] Ultimately Russhe laid claim to the names (and inheritances) of multiple noble houses, and asserted rights to land in Derbyshire, Norfolk and Lincolnshire, plus 'tenne £' and a 'gowld ring', for good measure.[119] Russhe wove a lurid dynastic tapestry to justify and rationalise a life of distress and hardship, situate himself as a person of wealth and status with an illustrious pedigree, demonstrate the extent of his victimisation at the hands of others, and establish his credentials to lay claim to a vast landed fortune.

The notion of an exalted lineage exerted a powerful pull on the Tudor imagination and seems to have been a natural way for distressed authors to justify adversity, as well as to establish their status and trustworthiness for the exalted recipients of their letters. A man named Johnson, labelled by Burghley's secretariat as 'a frantique person', wrote a pair of letters to Burghley in 1591 with a similar underlying narrative to Russhe's: he had been 'borne a noble man from noble Parentes', but 'by many morders' had 'lost my Parentes in my infancie'.[120] Like Russhe, Johnson claimed to have moved around between various noble families, and

[115]Lansdowne 99 n. 6, fo. 13^{r}.

[116]Lansdowne 99 n. 35, fo. 92^{r}.

[117]*Acts of the Privy Council of England Volume 10, 1577–1578,* ed. John Roche Dasent (1895), 146; *Acts of the Privy Council of England Volume 11, 1578–1580*, ed. John Roche Dasent (1895), 194, 214–5, 371; *Acts of the Privy Council of England Volume 12, 1580–1581*, ed. John Roche Dasent (1896), 29, 353–4.

[118]Cf. Susan Wabuda, 'Bertie [née Willoughby; other married name Brandon], Katherine, duchess of Suffolk (1519–1580)', *ODNB*, https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2273.

[119]Lansdowne 99 n. 22, fos. 60^{r}–61^{r}.

[120]Lansdowne 99 n. 13, fo. 30^{r}; Lansdowne 99 n. 15, fo. 36^{r}.

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like Russhe sinister forces left a series of deaths in their wake as they attempted to keep him from his inheritance.[121] Johnson's narration of his lineage contained apparent autobiographical fragments blended with real members of the Tudor nobility and mythical figures of medieval chivalric romance.[122] The Fellow of Pembroke College Cambridge Anthony Greene, described as 'distracted' by Burghley's secretariat, also constructed a fantastical pedigree in a letter to Burghley's secretary Sir Michael Hickes, seeking assurance that Burghley would 'assiste me to clam claime [the throne of] Scotland for my selfe'.[123] Greene also indicated a desire to marry the elder daughter of the king of Spain in order to assert a claim to the Spanish throne, and 'for r recompence of suffering my selfe to be so much the more empoverished', he requested 'the Byshopperie of Elie' and Durham house in London. He ended his life in Bethlehem hospital (Bedlam).[124] Reflections on personal, national, dynastic, international, confessional and ecclesiastical politics all merged in the distressed mind of Anthony Greene, the *leitmotif* of which was a desperate desire for authority and security.

Conclusion

The Lansdowne 99 letters discussed here form a distinctive corpus, but the existence of that corpus is a product of the historical formation of the modern archive. Annotations were made by the initial recipients of the letters, and latterly by their subsequent owners and custodians, who added their own assessments of the material and subjected it to thematic 'methodisation', foregrounding a thematic coherence which may well have remained hidden across such a vast repository had it been categorised or organised differently (or not at all). As historians, therefore, we need to be more alert to the ways in which the judgements of past generations of antiquarians and archivists have the potential to shape and even create subjects for modern historical enquiry (as well as to obscure them). As a result of the formation of Lansdowne 99, it has been possible in this article to present a case study in the individual, collective and archival construction of 'distress'. I have illustrated how the particular historical context of Elizabethan England shaped the ways in which a diverse group of distressed subjects rationalised their experiences and expressed themselves when entreating those in authority for aid. While contemporaries, near-contemporaries, archival cataloguers, and modern historians have generally labelled the individuals who produced this unique collection of epistolary sources as 'mad', I have argued instead for approaching them through the lens of the history of emotions, in order to explore how individuals inhabiting various positions along a spectrum of evident 'distress' understood and represented their circumstances, allowing us to advance beyond

[121]Lansdowne 99 n. 15, fo. 36^{r}–37^{r}.

[122]*Ibid*., fo. 37^{r}.

[123]Greene's distinctive repetitions, combined with his letter's cramped hand, interlinear additions and crossings out, raise the potential of a more thoroughgoing material analysis of these letters. For a fruitful example of this approach, see Ella Sbaraini, 'The Materiality of English Suicide Letters, c. 1700–c.1850', *The Historical Journal*, 65.3 (2022), 612–39.

[124]Lansdowne 99 n. 29, fo. 78$^{r–v}$; Patricia Allderidge, 'Management and Mismanagement at Bedlam, 1547–1633', in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Charles Webster (Cambridge, 1979), 153.

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methodologically and ethically problematic issues of pathologisation. This exploration of distress, and through it the relationships between archives, letters, culture and emotion in the late sixteenth century, may help to frame investigations into similar relationships for other periods. It may even encourage us to reflect upon the ways in which social and cultural realities continue to shape our own experience(s) of distress today.

Casting a spotlight on the authors of the Lansdowne 99 letters reveals a set of individual subjectivities in which emotional states intersected not only with history and culture, but with social status, gender, religion, the lifecycle, and a set of complex personal histories, making each story in the final instance unique. If we can make any generalisations about the distress encountered here, in fuzzy silhouette, it is that it was diverse: in cause, nature, severity, impact and duration. However, across fifty or so letters, some thirty authors and tens of thousands of words, a series of themes emerge. Shaped in part by the nature of the evidence – letters to the government of Elizabethan England – these individuals all had pressing needs. These were often financial or material, relating to lawsuits, patronage, reputation, and other fears: on balance the letters' authors come across as marginalised and/or fallen on hard times. Despite being dismissed by the archive as 'mad', they all expressed a strong actual and rhetorical sense of their own deservingness, framed and narrated in a variety of ways: in relation to reputation, credit, status, loyalty, godliness, a duty of care over dependants of various kinds, and the duty of the authorities (particularly the queen) to care for them. For many authors, marginalisation tipped over into a sense of victimisation. They wrote in fear of their lives, whether from the direct machinations of enemies known or unknown, or highlighting existential fears which made a particularly prominent impact on the popular psyche – the fear of Spanish invasion and the fear of God's wrath being the most powerful examples. Many authors were imprisoned, or had been in the past, suggesting strong affinities between distress, (alleged) criminal behaviour and incarceration. One common way in which individuals frequently sought to understand their situation and demonstrate their worthiness was by establishing their status through narrating links to the great and the good, sometimes engaging in the construction of inventive and even fantastical pedigrees. In the most extreme cases individuals identified themselves as of royal or divine heritage, to demonstrate beyond question their deservingness for aid while simultaneously attempting to leverage an influence which they otherwise lacked over those in authority. As well as indicating the kinds of categories and tropes which shaped the construction and expression of distress, therefore, we also gain a sense from the letters of Lansdowne 99 of some of the central preoccupations, categories and concerns of the late-sixteenth-century English psyche. The letters of these distressed individuals display a series of rhetorical and narrative choices which were rooted in their authors' ontological assumptions about the world. Understanding distress therefore not only brings us closer to marginalised people in the past, but grants us a richer knowledge of past societies and of the experience of being human in them.

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