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TWO MAD MONARCHS

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For over three decades, from the late 1780s till beyond the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo, Great Britain and her ancient ally Portugal were subject to sovereigns who suffered from mental illness, namely George III, born in 1738, and Maria I, born in 1734. Both lived into their early eighties. Both eventually came to be treated by my namesake, Dr Francis Willis, though there exists no known family connection between us. Francis Willis, however, was the great-grandson of the distinguished seventeenth-century Oxford physician Thomas Willis.¹

The case of King George is better known, owing to Alan Bennett's play *The Madness of George III* of 1992² and Nicholas Hytner's film version of 1994, *The Madness of King George*, which is closely based on Bennett's text.³ In psychiatric circles prominence for 'Farmer' George's malady had also been created more than two decades earlier by the thesis of Hunter and Macalpine, *George III and the Mad-Business*, in which they argued that the King had been suffering from porphyria, essentially a physical, metabolic disorder with a tendency towards mental derangement.⁴ In some cases it can be hereditary. This retrospective diagnosis, after having gained

1 -M. T. Haslam, 'The Willis Family and George III', *History of Psychiatry*, 8 (1997), 539-53 (541). The first description of manic-depressive psychosis is attributed to Dr Thomas Willis (see p. 540).

2 -Alan Bennett, *The Madness of George III* (London & Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 1992).

3 -The film was memorable for the performances of Nigel Hawthorne as King George, Helen Mirren as Queen Charlotte and Ian Holm as Dr Willis.

4 -Ida Macalpine & Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1969).

wide acceptance, has, however, now been powerfully challenged by Professor Timothy Peters of Birmingham University, who has had prolonged experience in treating patients suffering from porphyria.⁵

Whatever the retrospective diagnosis, it is clear that, with effect from October 1788, King George began to suffer from some form of disorder that produced irrational and violent behaviour. Whatever the physical symptoms of the King's illness, it is important to recognize that psychological factors may be advanced as well. He never really recovered from the loss of the thirteen American colonies, from New Hampshire right down to Georgia. The *Declaration of Independence* had been published in 1776, and the final defeat of the British had ensued with the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781.

King George, who had involved himself closely in the decision-making processes affecting the administration of the colonies, felt their loss to be a deeply personal catastrophe. His resultant and recurrent feelings of depression were aggravated by the *Declaration of Independence*: instead of attacking the British State, Thomas Jefferson, its main author, chose to blame the King himself, roundly condemning him as a tyrant. The King would have been only too well aware that that very accusation had led to Charles I losing his head at Whitehall just a century and a quarter earlier. The relevant wording of the *Declaration* could hardly have been more wounding: 'The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of

5 -Timothy Peters, 'King George III and Porphyria: A Clinical Re-examination of the Historical Evidence' (publication forthcoming in *History of Psychiatry* in 2010). I am very grateful to Professor Peters for his most helpful advice and suggestions in the production of the present paper.

an absolute tyranny over these states.' Twice, in 1782 and 1783, King George desperately drafted letters of abdication. Five years later, whatever the true cause, mental illness was upon him.

By a curious coincidence the mental disorders of King George and of Queen Maria were in some measure recorded respectively by two prominent English novelists and diarists, Fanny Burney and William Beckford, who were almost exact contemporaries of each other. The King's illness was, however, first noted by Sir George Baker, President of the Royal College of Physicians, and one of the cluster of men of medicine who attended him. In his diary entries for the latter half of October 1788 (beginning on Friday the 17th) Baker observed a bilious attack, abdominal pains, leg pains and swollen feet. None of these symptoms seems to have lasted long. More significant and lasting, though intermittent, were a high pulse rate, confused vision and delirium.⁶ Just as in the case of Queen Maria, the words 'fever' and 'frenzy' seem to have been used interchangeably in the bulletins of the Court physicians, whereas fever in modern times is equated with high body temperature. The King talked rapidly and excitedly for many, many hours on end, sometimes foaming at the mouth, and consequently becoming extremely hoarse. Fanny Burney, who was second keeper of Queen Charlotte's robes, observed what she called the King's 'positive delirium' and declared his voice to be 'so hoarse it is painful to hear him'.⁷ Royal equerry Robert Greville recorded the King's 'almost total suspension of reason' and mentions that on one occasion he talked for nineteen hours.⁸ Lord Sheffield reported to the ambassador to Spain, William

6 -Royal College of Physicians, London: Baker papers, MS 92.

7 -Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, 1778-1840*, ed. Charlotte Barrett, 6 vols (London: Macmillan, 1905), iv, 131, 121.

8 -Robert Fulke Greville, *The Diaries of Colonel the Hon. Robert Fulke Greville, Equerry to His Majesty King George III*, ed. F. McKno Bladon (London: John Lane, 1930), pp. 80-81.

Eden (the future Lord Auckland), that on another occasion, in November, King George 'talked incessantly for sixteen hours [...], they endeavoured to turn him to writing: at length he began to compose notes on Don Quixote.'⁹ This report suggests that the King's mood was prone to fluctuate and that he had periods when reason returned; we can, however, only conjecture whether he was actually considering the potential parallels between himself and Cervantes's celebrated fictional personage.

The month of November 1788 was notable for the King's violent outbursts and danger to others. As we shall see, that month was also a devastating period for the Queen of Portugal. A modern risk assessment would have had clear grounds for recording King George's attempts at self-harm (he is reported to have put his feet in a fire, and his doctors had to remove sharp objects and shaving and hair-cutting equipment). It would also have mentioned the possibility of a suicidal potential in that he was once reported to have attempted to jump out of a window. Such a risk assessment would most certainly have stressed the King's vulnerability, his uncharacteristically foul language and uninhibited sexual behaviour towards ladies of the royal household. But his acts of aggression were the most notable and noted feature.

Fanny Burney reports that on 5 November rumour had it that the King had seized the Prince of Wales by the throat.¹⁰ On the same day Sir George Baker recorded that His Majesty was the victim of 'an entire alienation of the mind.'¹¹ It was a month in which the King would often strike and kick out at his royal

9 -William, Lord Auckland, *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland*, 4 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1861-62), Lord Sheffield to Mr Eden, 22 Nov 1788, II, 244.

10 - Burney, IV, 131.

11 -Baker papers, MS 92.

pages in their efforts to restrain him.¹² One page, Philip Withers, graphically set down what he experienced. His evidence is admittedly opportunistic, appearing as it did in a pamphlet in the following year and with the obvious goal of financial gain. Nowadays, no doubt, he would have headed straight for the less reputable Sunday newspapers. When taking lemonade to the King, he alleged that:

He seized me by the collar, threw down the glass, and then attacked me with so much vigour and alacrity that I was constrained to call for assistance. [...] I withdrew to change my clothes, to wash the blood from myself and to desire Mr Dundas [the Royal Apothecary] to give me a lotion for assuaging my pains.¹³

But, as Withers goes on to tell us, far worse was to befall Sir George Baker, the esteemed President of the Royal College of Physicians, when the latter was about to take the King's pulse:

His royal patient saluted him with so tremendous a blow on the forehead that he instantly measured his learned length on the floor, to the astonishment of the attendants and the exultation of the King. [Grabbing his chamber pot from his commode, he] pours it on the visage of the prostrate knight. What a sight! What a smell! We ran to succour Sir George, but our kind intentions were frustrated by the Sovereign, who stood over the body of the new-made knight, brandishing the patella [*i.e.*, the pot], and threatened immediate death to all who presumed to move or speak.¹⁴

12 -Greville, pp. 104, 106, 112-14.

13 -Philip Withers, *History of the Royal Malady by a Page of the Presence* (London: 9 Queen Street, Grosvenor Square, 1789), pp. 32-33.

14 -Withers, p. 37.

On another occasion the King grabbed Sir George's wig, 'flung it in his face, threw him on his back and told him he might star-gaze.'¹⁵ Perhaps we should receive these accounts by a former page with a large pinch of salt. Nevertheless, in his play, Bennett took advantage of the second alleged incident in that an account of it is delivered by the actor playing the role of Doctor Warren.

The royal physicians were at a loss as to what to do next. Various techniques were tried: bleeding, blistering, the application of leeches, the administering of emetics and purgatives, the transfer of the King from Windsor Castle to Kew Palace, all to no avail. Enter the Reverend Doctor Francis Willis. Summoned to help on the recommendation of Lady Harcourt, the wife of a royal equerry, for he had had success in treating her mother, he duly appeared at Kew on 5 December. Already aged seventy, he had earned a wide and respected reputation for his treatment of the mentally deranged at an asylum that he ran at Greatford Hall, near Stamford in Lincolnshire. An Oxford graduate, he had also taken Holy Orders, as well as holding the degree of Doctor of Medicine. He was greatly assisted by two of his sons, John and Robert, both of whom had degrees in medicine, and by a team of burly male attendants. As therapy, he often employed his less agitated patients as ploughmen and gardeners at his Greatford estate.

Fanny Burney found Willis to be free, lively and independent [...], a man of ten thousand, honest, dauntless, light-hearted, innocent and high-minded [...], not merely unacquainted with Court etiquette, but wholly, and most artlessly, unambitious to form any such acquaintance.¹⁶

15 -Auckland, Sheffield to Eden, 22 Nov 1788, II, 244.

16 -Burney, IV, 215.

Lord Sheffield, however, reported that others were far less complimentary:

He is considered by some to be not much better than a mountebank, and not far different from some of those that are confined in his house [...]; but the opinions of all the physicians are not much respected.¹⁷

Indeed, the Court physicians, among them notably Baker, Richard Warren, and Sir Lucas Pepys, were somewhat disdainful of Willis, as he was not a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. Taking immediate control (on that proviso he had insisted), Willis at once objected to Pepys's continued blistering of the Sovereign's legs and brought it to a halt on the perfectly valid grounds that it was causing their patient excruciating pain and led to further violence and to inevitable loss of sleep. Four days later, on 9 December 1788, he was already appearing with the other major physicians before a Parliamentary Committee and claimed that:

His Majesty's indisposition has been brought about by using very strong exercise (*doubtless a reference to the King's passion for vigorous riding at full gallop*), taking little sustenance, watching, or want of sleep, perhaps when his mind was on the stretch with very weighty affairs.¹⁸

Whatever we may think about the galloping and lack of food as causes, those 'very weighty affairs' would, no doubt, have included the loss of the American colonies and the opening,

17 -Auckland, Sheffield to Eden, 12 Dec 1788, II, 256.

18 -*Report of the Lords Committees Appointed to Examine the Physicians who have Attended His Majesty during his Illness* (London: J. Stockdale, 1788), pp. 5-6.

back in February, of the seven-year trial of Warren Hastings for alleged maladministration of Britain's other major overseas undertaking, India.

Meanwhile, the general public was becoming gradually aware of the train of events: in November and December of 1788, Thomas Rowlandson published several cartoons illustrating both the King's mental illness and the political manoeuvres of the Whig Opposition in Parliament. The Whigs were keen to have the Prince of Wales declared Regent. Further cartoons lampooned the methods of Dr Willis (though the image of Willis waving a whip at cowering patients was a typical cartoonist's distortion).¹⁹ Later, the celebrated poet and painter William Blake, who blamed the King for the loss of the American colonies, penned the verse diatribe 'America, a Prophecy' (1793), in which the King's madness is presented as the deserved outcome:

Albion's Guardian (*the King*) writhed in torment on
the eastern sky,
pale, quiv'ring towards the brain, his glimmering
eyes, teeth chattering,
howling and shuddering, his legs quivering, convuls'd
each muscle and sinew.²⁰

The Whig campaign to propel the Prince of Wales into the position of Regent was spearheaded by the Leader of the Opposition Charles Fox (whom the King heartily detested), by the great orator Edmund Burke (author of sundry brilliant

19 - Kenneth Baker, *George III: A Life in Caricature* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), pp. 108-10; Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 169-72.

20 - William Blake, *A Selection of Poems and Letters*, ed. Jacob Bronowski (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 120.

political tracts) and by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (better known for his outstanding plays *The Rivals* of 1775 and *The School for Scandal* of 1777). They were greatly encouraged by Dr Warren's view that the King was incurable, and Burke, as we shall see, was influenced by Sir George Baker's opinion that Willis was a quack.

Nevertheless, amid all the publicity and political intrigue, Willis forged ahead, supremely confident that he could bring about the King's recovery. He maintained that mental illness was the result of over-excitation. Patients must be controlled like 'horses in a manège'.²¹ They must be dominated both physically and psychologically. His resort to physical restraint was paramount, exercised by a straitjacket and a gag and, on occasion, by a restraining chair. To these he added his own steady hypnotic gaze.

While resorting to the straitjacket and a gag, Willis throughout December also gave to his royal patient doses of quinine (then called 'Jesuits' bark' or 'Peruvian bark') in order to lower his fever (*i.e.*, high body temperature) and to induce perspiration. Calomel pills and other purgative drugs were also administered. The King experienced good days and bad days, presenting, in particular, huge variations in his pulse rate. Despite one further crisis, by the last week of the month there were signs of greater calm and a gradual improvement.²² Captain Sidney Smith wrote to Eden in Madrid that Queen Charlotte was at this juncture

21 - Macalpine & Hunter, p. 53.

22 - Charles Chenevix Trench, *The Royal Malady* (London: Longmans, 1964), pp. 131-36.

much dissatisfied with Sir George Baker and Dr Warren, and very well satisfied with the change and treatment introduced by Dr Willis, which, from the most violent and harsh, is now the most gentle possible.²³

On 9 January 1789 Willis and his fellow physicians appeared before a second Parliamentary Committee. Warren continued to take the pessimistic line that the Sovereign was incurable. Pepys and two others (Reynolds and Gisburne) 'agreed in improved symptoms'.²⁴ Willis was the most assured and confident and duly outlined his treatment methods and the medication administered to their royal patient. When he informed the Committee that one of the medicaments prescribed was 'gum quiacum' [*i.e.*, gum guaiacum], that remark led at once to Edmund Burke snarling back 'Gum quackum!', one of the great orator's less impressive performances.²⁵

A week later, the Duke of Dorset wrote to Eden in Madrid that the King was 'a whole deal better, and Willis certainly has the most sanguine hope of his recovery.'²⁶ On 24 January the restraining chair was introduced in place of the harsher straitjacket. Notwithstanding the improvement, the chair was still needed for when the King became over-excited. King George, who had not lost his sense of humour, ruefully christened it his 'Coronation Chair'.²⁷ That irony was brilliantly amplified by Hytner: in his prize-winning film, the scene which presents the King being tethered in the chair is poignantly accompanied on the soundtrack by the rousing chorus of Handel's *Zadok the*

23 -Auckland, Captain Sidney Smith RN to Eden, 30 Dec 1788, p. 263.

24 -Auckland, the Archbishop of Canterbury (John Moore) to Eden, 16 Jan 1789, pp. 266-67.

25 -Trench, p. 148.

26 -Auckland, the Duke of Dorset to Eden, 17 Jan 1789, p. 271.

27 -Macalpine and Hunter, p. 78.

Priest. That composition had originally been written for the coronation of the King's grandfather, George II, and has been sung at all subsequent coronations.

Meanwhile, the regime of emetics and purgatives continued throughout January and February 1789. By 19 February, Willis's domination of the King led Lord Sheffield to write that his Sovereign 'is much afraid of Dr Willis', adding, however, that he 'has been lately reported in a progressive state of improvement, but he is occasionally outrageous, and on particular subjects quite deranged.'²⁸ Then there came a sudden and swift recovery: on 24 February both the Archbishop of Canterbury and a certain Mr Storer wrote that the King was now much better and seeing his ministers again. 'The vessel has righted again. Ministry is perfectly afloat.'²⁹

The Tory Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, was greatly relieved. The Regency Bill was shelved. The joint campaign of the Prince of Wales and the Whig Opposition was thwarted in the nick of time. The Prince of Wales was then confronted with a twenty-two-year wait before gaining the position of Prince Regent and a further nine before finally succeeding to the throne as George IV in 1820. His father had reigned for sixty years. Later, Queen Victoria reigned for sixty-three years before Edward VII could succeed her in 1901. A similar long wait characterizes our own day...

The King convalesced for over a month and was rapturously received at a service at Saint Paul's Cathedral on Saint George's Day (23 April). Dr Willis celebrated what he saw as a great triumph by having medallions struck which bore the words

28 -Auckland, Sheffield to Eden, 19 Feb 1789, p. 288.

29 -Auckland, Storer to Eden, 24 Feb 1789, p. 296.

'Britons rejoice, your King's restored.' We can only wonder just how effective his treatment was and whether the royal recovery was simply spontaneous or truly the result of Willis's efforts. Whatever the case, there were brief recurrent episodes in 1801 and 1804, handled in each case by Willis's two physician sons, John and Robert. Their father, Francis, died in 1807, aged eighty-nine and active till the very end. By 1809 the King was almost blind from cataracts. Towards the end of his Jubilee year, 1810, the Willis straitjacket had to be applied again, this time by Dr Robert Willis. The King had been overcome with grief, to the point of derangement, at the death of his daughter, Princess Amelia. His last sad decade was marked by blindness, loneliness and mental illness from which there was no recovery.

In Portugal the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century were dominated by the reigns of João V and José I. To outrageous and serial adultery, especially with nuns, King João added obsessively devout religious observance and, latterly, bouts of deep depression (a problem that Queen Maria, his grand-daughter, may well have inherited, as, indeed, from her maternal grandfather, King Philip V of Spain). King João's son, José I, followed suit to a lesser extent in both his sex life and his religious observance, though his indolence in all matters was his principal trade mark. The dictator and would-be reformer known to posterity as the Marquis of Pombal became King José's chief minister (Ministro do Reino) shortly after the 1755 earthquake, a catastrophe that propelled him into power, especially in the light of the King's failure to cope with the situation or focus on the proper conduct of the realm. Significantly, Pombal's actions need examination in any account of Queen Maria's later mental condition.

Having served as a diplomat both in London and Vienna,

Pombal was deeply conscious of the comparative backwardness of his own country. A controversial figure, he mingled the beneficial with the disastrous in a dictatorship that ran for over twenty years. He earned from twentieth-century republicans the dubious honour of a statue atop a marble pillar that towers over Lisbon's swirling traffic with a panache that surpasses even Nelson's Column. A major objective of his was to crush the influence of a corrupt and feckless nobility and what he saw as the stifling power of the Church, most especially of the Jesuits. This was largely because the Jesuits counted among their number several Father Confessors to members of the Royal Family and because in many respects they controlled activities in Portugal's ramshackle empire in South America, Africa and Asia. There they played prominent roles in trade and agriculture, as well as moulding the minds of indigenous populations. In South America they got in the way of both Spanish and Portuguese government policy, as was admirably illustrated in Fritz Hochwälder's play *Das heilige Experiment (The Strong are Lonely)* of 1942 and in Robert Bolt's screenplay *The Mission* of 1986.³⁰

Pombal's reign of terror had begun in 1757 with the hanging of thirteen men and four women for riotous protest over the price of wine in Oporto. Well over a hundred more were deported to Africa or given lengthy prison sentences. But the most vicious reprisal took place the following year, 1758, when several nobles, principally the Távora family, were accused and tortured for their alleged part in an attempt on the King's life. Whatever the truth, the grisly outcome was a public execution of ten nobles and three of their servants: in various combinations they were beheaded, hanged, garrotted, burnt alive and broken on the wheel. Finally, the whole shambles was set alight, and the

30 - *The Mission* was particularly notable for strong performances from Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons.

ashes tipped into the Tagus. The Jesuits also were implicated. In 1761 there followed the burning at the stake of their Italian leader, Father Gabriele Malagrida. The Jesuits were outlawed and expelled from Portugal and the Portuguese empire. Then, with French and Spanish support, Pombal obtained a worldwide Papal ban which lasted from 1773 till 1814, though the Jesuits managed to survive in the United States, in the Russia of Catherine the Great and as 'the gentlemen' at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire; indeed, in Washington DC they founded the University of Georgetown in 1789.

What of Dona Maria? Obtaining a dispensation, Pombal contrived her marriage in 1760 to her uncle Pedro, seventeen years her senior and brother of her father King José. Both Maria and Pedro were noted for their religious fervour and daily observance. On the death of King José in 1777, Maria moved swiftly to dismiss Pombal. Her husband reigned jointly as Pedro III. He was, however, as uninterested in public affairs as his late brother, leaving all such duties to his Queen. Their Court and chapel were celebrated throughout Europe for the quality of their musicians.³¹ Prominent among them were João de Sousa Carvalho and his illustrious pupil Marcos Portugal.

The reversal of many of Pombal's policies led to Dona Maria's popularity for her beneficence. However, the downfall of Pombal brought also a resurgence of the nobility and consequent demands and litigation aimed at the the rehabilitation of the Távora clan and the restitution of their property. Owing to her great love for her father and respect for his memory, it was with extreme reluctance that Queen Maria had signed sundry such documents. On signing one such decree of rehabilitation in 1781 (four years

³¹ -William Beckford, *Italy: with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), II, 123 (Letter XXI, 22 August 1787).

into her reign), she scratched out her signature, exclaiming that she was 'condenada aos infernos' (that she was damned to hellfire, namely for reversing a decision notionally made by her father José I, despite the fact that he had left all such tasks to Pombal).³² She was borne off to her apartments in delirium. She plainly considered herself damned because her amiable but firm Father Confessor was against the reversal of such attainders and insisted that the confiscations should stand. Significantly, Dona Maria's mental and physical health deteriorated over the following decade.

Her first biographer, Caetano Beirão, quotes an *ofício* (official document) of 4 Feb 1792, namely a letter from the radical and progressive Minister of Foreign Affairs and War, Luís Pinto de Sousa Coutinho, the future first Viscount of Balsemão; the letter was sent to the Portuguese Ambassador to the Court of Saint James's in London, Cipriano de Ribeiro Freire. It urged that Dona Maria was somewhat nervous and timid by nature and was the victim of her own vivid imagination:

Sofre há anos moléstias de estômago e uma grande adstrição de ventre, que se tem exaltado com a aversão que a Mesma Senhora tem a todos os remédios purgantes, e principalmente ajudas, que nunca consentiu. (She has suffered for years from stomach upsets and a great constriction of the bowels, which has been exacerbated by the aversion the Selfsame Lady shows towards all purgative remedies,³³ particularly enemas, which she has never permitted.)³⁴

³² -Caetano Beirão, *Dona Maria I, 1777-1792*, 3rd edn (Lisbon: Empresa Nacional de Publicidade, 1944), p. 167.

³³ -No doubt including senna, as with George III.

³⁴ -Beirão, p. 411; Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros (hereafter A.N.T.T., M.N.E.), Maço 110 (2), Despachos do Governo, 1792-1793.

The year 1786 saw the death of Queen Maria's consort, King Pedro. This is the point at which to introduce William Beckford, that immensely wealthy and self-obsessed aesthete and man of letters, who paid three lengthy visits to Portugal in the 1780s and 1790s. His tendency to invent means that his accounts are not always wholly reliable. Beckford, nevertheless, was quite shameless in his persistent approaches to Dom Diogo, the Marquis of Marialva, with a view to an introduction to the Queen.³⁵ The closest he got in 1787 was at a dinner-party with fireworks at Penha Verde, Marialva's villa near Sintra:

Her manner struck me as being peculiarly dignified and conciliating. She looks born to command; but at the same time to make that high authority as much beloved as respected. Justice and clemency, the motto so glaringly misapplied on the banner of the abhorred Inquisition, might be transferred with the strictest truth to this good princess. During the fatal contest betwixt England and its [American] colonies, the wise neutrality that she persevered in maintaining was of the most vital benefit to her dominions, and hitherto, the native commerce of Portugal has attained under her mild auspices an unprecedented degree of prosperity.³⁶

This last comment is certainly true of the post-Pombal period, namely of the decade from 1777.

But, just as with George III, thoughts of abdication lay behind the brave face: Marialva 'told me in the strictest confidence

35 -Malcolm Jack, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo* (New York: AMS Press, 1996), pp. 35-36, 50.

36 -Beckford, *Italy* (1834), II, 196-97 (Letter xxix, 22 September 1787).

that the Queen had thoughts of retiring from government, that she was worn out with the intrigues of the Court and sick of her existence.³⁷ The resurgent nobility was making her life unbearable. It is noteworthy that her grandfather, Philip V of Spain, had likewise suffered from deep depression and wanted to abandon his throne.

Again writing in 1787, Beckford is very informative about the Queen's Father Confessor, mentioning him on five occasions.³⁸ Brother Inácio de São Caetano had originally been planted as her Confessor by Pombal on the grounds that he was 'sufficiently shrewd, jovial, and ignorant, to make a very harmless and comfortable confessor.' A fascinating character, Brother Inácio had started out in life as a clown at country fairs. After Dona Maria's accession he had also been given the title of Grand Inquisitor and had been granted the bishopric of Penafiel as well as the ludicrous title of Archbishop of Thessalonica in Greece. Beckford soon discovered him to be lecherous, learning that he was forever chasing after Palace 'nymphs'. He also euphemistically describes him as 'sturdy' (*i.e.*, obese). During Beckford's 1787 sojourn 'the good Archbishop' was also given 'supreme direction [...] of the Cabinet, much against his will.' Dining with him at the Palácio da Vila, in Sintra, Beckford found him 'pleasant', 'open' and 'cordial' and later described him as being an 'honest-hearted, kind old man' who was 'good-humoured [and] benevolent', despite 'the despotic roughness he sometimes assumed both in voice and gesture.'

37 -William Beckford, *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain*, ed. Boyd Alexander (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 242 (Monday, 22 October 1787).

38 -Beckford, *Italy* (1834), II, 73 (Letter xiv, 14 June); II, 92 (Letter xvi, 30 June); II, 125 (Letter xxi, 26 August); II, 170 (Letter xxvii, 12 September); II, 251 (Letter xxxiii, 25 November).

1788 was Maria's *annus horribilis*. In September it pitched the Queen into deep mourning at the death from smallpox of the Prince of Brazil, her son and heir, the Crown Prince Dom José, who was aged only 27. Dom José was a radical, educated under the direction of Pombal, and was feared by the nobility, lest he return to the dictator's repressive policies. On the advice of her physicians the Queen had prevented his vaccination. His demise raises the question of whether the physicians had been malevolently manipulated by Court nobles and Church leaders, as is sometimes alleged. The fatal month of November 1788 also made life all the more harrowing for the Queen owing to the deaths of her Father Confessor Brother Inácio, her daughter Maria Ana Vitória, her daughter's husband (Don Gabriel, an infante of Spain) and their new-born second child: they too all perished from smallpox. There also occurred the deaths, from other causes, of her chief minister (the Marquis of Angeja) and of her uncle, Charles III of Spain. Worse was to come with the appointment of her stern new Father Confessor, Dom José Maria de Melo, the Bishop of the Algarve. According to the Queen's second biographer, Mário Domingues, some claimed that the bishop exerted a 'pressão funesta na sua mente' (a grim pressure on her mind), asserting that her father was burning in Hell for the sufferings of the Távora clan.³⁹

Maria's earlier biographer, Beirão, claims⁴⁰ that Beckford considered her mental illness not to have been produced by her new Father Confessor, despite Beckford's dislike for him, but more probably by the mental conflict caused between her love for her dead son, the radical Dom José, and her royal and public duties which were far from radical in nature. In other words, the

39 -Mário Domingues, *Dona Maria I e a sua Época* (Lisbon: Romano Torres, 1972), p.249.

40 -Beirão, p. 409.

illness was not brought on by scruples inculcated by the Bishop of the Algarve (whom Beckford, nevertheless, thought to be 'fanatical'). Beirão derives this observation from a quotation which is erroneously located by Beirão in Beckford's *Italy; with Sketches from Spain and Portugal* (it's not there) and has so far proved untraceable. Apparently, Beckford contended that it was simply a case of her loyalty to the memory of her dead son and dead father, both of whom were anti-Távora, being at odds with her perceived public duty to reinstate the Távora clan and restore their property - and nothing to do with religious scruples.

However, Beckford, in the draft of a letter (*circa* 1792, mentioning Dr Willis's departure for Lisbon) written in French to an unidentified recipient, urged that her new Confessor had 'prêché les peines éternelles avec tant d'énergie que sa pauvre pénitente est devenue folle' (preached everlasting torment with such vehemence that his wretched penitent has gone mad).⁴¹ This assertion clearly contradicts the foregoing account by Beirão, but, characteristically, Beckford could have changed his view.

Maria must have seen herself as damned if she did rehabilitate the Távora clan (her perceived public duty, urged by persistent Court nobles) and damned if she didn't (if she followed the scruples of her two Confessors). Her anguished dilemma was highlighted by Beckford on his 1794 visit to Portugal, when he recorded her visual hallucinations of her father burning in Hell for his treatment, at Pombal's behest, of the noble clan.⁴²

41 -Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires, *William Beckford e Portugal* (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1987), pp. 173-74.

42 -William Beckford, *Italy, Spain and Portugal* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), p. 438.

Maria's mind became progressively unhinged over a lengthy period, though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when her occasional bouts of delirium finally gave way to insanity of a more lasting nature. There was much to trouble her. The American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) had made European royalty precarious. Maria had experienced at the age of 21 the devastation of much of her capital city and the loss of many thousands of lives in the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. She had been well aware of the Jesuits' shrill claims that the earthquake was the 'wrath of God'. She had lived through the attempted assassination of her father and was only too well aware of the ghastly punishment wrought by Pombal against the alleged perpetrators. She had witnessed Pombal's destruction of Jesuit power and his brutal reign of terror against all who opposed his policies. She had seen smallpox sweep away many members of her family and snatch away the lives of ten per cent of all Portuguese - was this again, to one so devout, the 'wrath of God'? The Queen and her Court were aware too of George III's mental illness in 1788-89.⁴³ All these factors must have added to Dona Maria's deep and growing depression (notwithstanding George III's alleged cure). We can only conjecture whether the grim Bishop of the Algarve harried her also about her arguably incestuous union, dispensation or no dispensation.

Her melancholic and growing depression became serious in October 1791. Let us examine again the official letter of 4 Feb 1792 of Foreign Minister Sousa Coutinho to Ambassador Freire in London:

Desde os princípios de Outubro [de 1791], se lhe principiou a descobrir uma grande melancolia, aflições nocturnas, sonos interrompidos, e abatimento de

43 -Pires, p. 205, n. 437.

espírito; isto continuou com pouca diferença até os fins de Dezembro, e no princípio de Janeiro se sangrou Sua Majestade por conselho dos médicos; depois deste termo tem crescido a moléstia progressivamente, e há nove dias se lhe tem exaltado a ponto que se receia muito um frenesim completo. (From the beginning of October [1791] she began to present a great melancholia, nocturnal distress, interrupted sleep and deep depression; this continued with little change until the end of December, and at the beginning of January Her Majesty was bled on the advice of her doctors;⁴⁴ after this juncture her illness has progressively increased, and nine days ago it became exacerbated to the point where there are fears of her passing into a total frenzy.)

Under pressure from a board of seventeen physicians, Sousa Coutinho urged Ambassador Freire to persuade 'Wallis' to come swiftly to treat the Queen, just as he had treated George III 'in analogous circumstances', and to spare no expense.⁴⁵ Back on 28 February 1789 the *Jornal Enciclopédico* and the *Gazeta de Lisboa* had simultaneously published an article translated from the *Mercure de France* of Paris concerning Dr Francis Willis, his 'Strait-Westcoat' and his apparent cure of George III.⁴⁶ Plainly, the Portuguese authorities already knew what to expect.

It is interesting to note here that, whatever her health, the Queen had always written regular letters to the Spanish Royal Family. On 21 January 1792 she wrote her habitual letter to Charles IV of Spain - but it was her last. Ignorant of what she wrote, we

44 - There were thirty of them (Pires, p. 175).

45 - Beirão, pp. 411-12; A.N.T.T., M.N.E., Maio 110 (2), Despachos do Governo, 1792-1793.

46 - Beirão, p. 417.

can only guess at its potential contents. Sousa Coutinho's *ofício* reveals that her malady got much worse on 27 January 1792. She was bled again on 11 February. The previous day a government decree had transferred all her authority to her surviving son, Prince João, already Prince of Brazil, though, oddly, he did not assume the title of Prince Regent till 1799, seven years later.

Sousa Coutinho sent a further *ofício* to Freire dated 22 February 1792: there was little improvement in the Queen's condition. She had been running a high temperature and been prone to delirious rages; these symptoms had subsided, but her delirium was almost permanent with occasional intervals of rationality and appropriate speech. Yet she constantly returned to her *idée fixe* that she was irremediably damned. She vehemently rejected all food. Her sleep was fitful, though sometimes she slept for three or four hours.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Ambassador Freire had got to work and reported back to Sousa Coutinho in *ofício* 270 of 29 February 1792. He had contacted Willis, who was reluctant to travel at the age of 73 and was demanding £30,000 to £40,000 for his services. Freire had skilfully persuaded him to come in exchange for £10,000 plus £1,000 per month, with full board and lodging, a personal carriage and all journeys and expenses paid. It is noteworthy that it was George III himself who advised Willis to accept, as the Ambassador was swift to point out.⁴⁸

Willis arrived at Falmouth on 3 March 1792, sailed on the *Hannover* on the 8th and, after the usual sea-tossed crossing of the Bay of Biscay, docked at Lisbon on the 15th, where he

47 - Beirão, p. 416; A.N.T.T., M.N.E., Maço 110 (2), Despachos do Governo, 1792-1793.

48 - Beirão, p. 418; Pires, pp. 174-75; A.N.T.T., M.N.E., Maço 110 (2), Despachos do Governo, 1792-1793.

was luxuriously installed in the Palácio das Necessidades. On the following day, having swiftly regained his land-legs, he hastened to examine the Queen at the Palace of Queluz. We have no information on whether he was accompanied by any of his 'team', but all references to his activity are in the third person singular, so it is reasonable to conclude that he had come alone.

Early impressions were far from being pessimistic: Sousa Coutinho wrote to Freire on 17 March that Willis did not find Her Majesty to be 'fora de esperança de cura' (beyond all hope of cure), and was beginning to 'pôr em prática o seu método curativo com felicidade' (happily put into practice his method of cure) and to 'aplicar os meios' (apply the means).⁴⁹ What the method or means were is not specified, but, as we know that the restraining straitjacket and a hypnotic stare loomed large in Willis's method, there can only be one likely interpretation. Four days later there followed another *ofício* from Sousa Coutinho to Freire recording that the patient was presenting a clear improvement, to the point where it was possible to entertain hopes of a complete recovery. Sadly, this situation was short-lived, for on 24 March Sousa Coutinho wrote a letter to his colleague Carvalho e Sampaio expressing 'a maior inquietação' (the greatest disquiet).⁵⁰

Despite his efforts, Willis was repeatedly thwarted by a horde of pious female courtiers who fed Maria's religious confusion. Finally, he suggested that the Queen should sail for England (he had other patients from overseas) and, indeed, that the voyage could possibly be therapeutic, but her courtiers (male and female) rejected the proposal. Willis had planned that she might sail on

49 - Beirão, p. 418; Pires, p. 204, n. 436; A.N.T.T., M.N.E., Maço 110 (2), Despachos do Governo, 1792-1793.

50 - Beirão, p. 419.

9 July, but when his plan was turned down he declared that Her Majesty was incurable. He sailed back to England, embarking on 3 August 1792, having loaded the ship's hold with prodigious quantities of port wine.⁵¹

The Queen's 'fever' had not returned, but her condition was now recognized as irremediable. Sousa Coutinho wrote again to London on 6 October 1792: 'Na preciosa saúde de Sua Majestade não há a mais leve esperança de melhora'. (There is not the slightest hope of any improvement in Her Majesty's precious health.)⁵² For years her delirious screams filled the Palace of Queluz. Beckford confirms her desperate wailing on his visit to Queluz in June 1794. The new Marquis of Angeja told him that Prince João had knelt for more than two hours by his mother's bedside that evening.

In a paroxysm of mental agony, she kept crying out for mercy, imagining that, in the midst of a raging flame which enveloped the whole chamber, she beheld her father's image a calcined mass of cinder [...]. This vision haunts her by night and by day.

Beckford himself then heard 'shrieks such as I hardly conceived possible [that] inflicted upon me a sensation of horror such as I never felt before.' The Queen's apartment was only two rooms away from where Beckford and Angeja were sitting, as 'in the bitterness of agony' she repeatedly exclaimed 'Ai Jesus! Ai Jesus!'⁵³ Acting on hearsay half a year earlier, on Christmas

51 - José Maria Latino Coelho, *História Política e Militar de Portugal desde os Fins do Século XVIII até 1814*, 3 vols (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1874-91), I, 290. Domingues (p. 257) asserts that the voyage began on 5 August and that Willis's payment amounted to £16,000.

52 - Domingues, p. 257.

53 - Spelled 'Jesus'; Beckford, *Italy, Spain and Portugal* (1840), pp. 438-39.

Eve 1793, Beckford had written from Lisbon to Sir William Hamilton, the British Ambassador at Naples:

Poor Mary Portugal fancies herself damned to all eternity, and, therefore, upon the strength of its being all over with her, eats turkey and oyster sauce Fridays and Saturdays, and indulges in conversations of rather an unchaste tendency.⁵⁴

One is reminded of George III's obscenities and blasphemies, but even breaking Friday abstinence was evidence, if it were true, that the once highly devout Queen had lost all hope of eternal salvation. Domingues writes of her brain being 'mergulhado em trevas' (plunged in darkness).⁵⁵

The years passed with no relief: the condition of the sorry sovereign of the Palace of Queluz remained the same, as she screamed and blasphemed and cursed. The Peninsular War overtook Portugal. In 1807 Viscount Strangford, the British Ambassador, insisted that the Royal Family should flee to Brazil. The Prince Regent turned to his mother but received only the answer that they were all bound for hellfire.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the flight began as the army of General Junot, the former French Ambassador, bore down on Lisbon at the end of November. The Royal Family and an entourage of thousands headed for the docks. The populace of Lisbon gained the first glimpse of their Queen for sixteen years as she yelled at her coachmen to slow down. Yet she was bundled aboard the *Príncipe Real*.

54 - J. W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford* (London: Oxford University Press & Humphrey Milford, 1932), p. 219.

55 - Domingues, p. 257.

56 - Rose Macaulay, *They Went to Portugal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), p. 371.

On 29 November 1807 the royal flotilla set sail, under British naval escort, thus narrowly escaping Junot's frustrated advance party. With the monarchy safe, the stage was set for the future Duke of Wellington and for what Napoleon lamented as his 'Spanish ulcer'.

In Brazil the Queen's health did not improve. Delirious outbursts continued. She was cared for in a Carmelite convent and was often seen by her Brazilian subjects travelling around Rio de Janeiro in her mule-drawn carriage. In her final days she was further tormented by dysentery and 'fever'.⁵⁷ She died in March 1816, four years ahead of that other mad octogenarian, George III. In the end Willis and sons had been unable to arrest their descent into a miserable and pathetic world of their own.

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57 - For Dona Maria's nine years spent in Brazil, see Patrick Wilcken, *Empire Adrift* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 66, 90, 93, 94, 165-67.