

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

JOHN MONRO MD AND CHARLES JAMES FOX:
ETCHING BY THOMAS ROWLANDSON*

THE picture reproduced in Fig. 1 is an unsigned etching dated 4 April 1784, which is firmly attributed on stylistic grounds to Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827).¹ The two figures depicted are identified as, on the left the Bethlem mad-doctor John Monro (1715–1791), and on the right the politician Charles James Fox (1749–1806). Dr Monro screws up his right eye as he raises a lens to his left and declares *As I have not the least hope of his Recovery. Let him be remov'd amongst the Incurable's – M—o.* The dashed word suggests the name Monro, and this identification is clinched both by comparison with the earlier (1769) portrait of Dr John Monro by Nathaniel Dance at the Royal College of Physicians (Fig. 2) and by the role which Charles James Fox plays in this print. Fox is portrayed with the attributes of a Bethlem inmate: he wears a straitjacket, has straw in his hair, and is oblivious to the doctor's presence (as Monro's statement also implied). He sings to himself the lament:

*My Lodging is on the Cold ground and very hard is my Case
But that which grieves me most is the Loosing of my Place.*

Below, the artist has etched into the copper in his own handwriting three heroic couplets, in which Fox's supposed lunacy is attributed to the disappointment of excessive ambition:

*Dazzled with hope He could not see the Cheat
Of aiming with impatience to be great –
With wild Ambition in his heart we find
Farewell content and quiet of his mind
For Glittering Clouds he left the solid Shore
And wonted happiness returns no more –*

At the foot is the imprint *Pubd April 4th 1784 by W. Humphrey No 227 Strand.*

John Monro MD Oxon., FRCP was the second of the four Monros who occupied the office of Physician to Bethlem Hospital from 1728 to 1853.² His father Dr James Monro (1680–1752) made the name Monro synonymous with mad-doctoring, as is

* By W. Schupbach, MA, Curator of iconographic collections, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP.

¹ It is attributed to Rowlandson by Joseph Grego, *Rowlandson the caricaturist*, vol. 1, London, Chatto & Windus, 1880, p. 124 (with made-up title 'The incurable') and by M. D. George, *Catalogue of political and personal satires . . . in the British Museum* (hereafter cited at *B.M. Cat. of sat.*), vol. 6, London, British Museum Publications, 1978 (repr. of 1938 edition), p. 81, no. 6495. It was published by E. G. O'Donoghue, *The story of Bethlehem Hospital*, London, Fisher Unwin, n.d. [1914], p. 257, with an attribution to Gillray, but comparison with such signed prints as *B.M. Cat. of sat.* nos. 6562A and 6563 confirms Rowlandson's authorship.

² Patricia Allderidge, *The Bethlem Historical Museum catalogue*, Beckenham, Kent, Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1976, pp. 18–20.

shown by Pope's references to him.³ Dr John Monro, portrayed here, held the post of Physician from 1752 to 1791. He is notable in psychiatric history for his pamphlet of 1758 in which he defended the physic practised in Bethlem, as established by his father, against the scepticism evinced by William Battie in his *Treatise on madness* published earlier in the same year.⁴ His successor was his son Dr Thomas Monro (1759–1833), the patron of Turner, Girtin, and other English watercolourists.⁵ The dynasty of Monros of Bethlem ended with his son, Dr Edward Thomas Monro (1790–1856). Dr John Monro's saying in the print *Let him be remov'd amongst the Incurable's* refers to the wings added to accommodate one hundred incurables at each end of the palatial façade of Bethlem in Moorfields between 1723 and 1733.⁶

At the date of this print, 4 April 1784, Charles James Fox was standing as parliamentary candidate in the furiously fought Westminster election which followed the dissolution of Parliament on 25 March.⁷ It was largely thanks to this election that 1784 held the eighteenth-century record for the number of political caricatures issued in five months: at least two hundred and fifty-seven were published from January to May.⁸ It is perhaps evidence of the frenzy of the time that the date of publication of our print, 4 April, was Palm Sunday.⁹ Apart from this etching, one other print from the polling period depicts Fox as a madman: it shows him lying in a Bethlem cell, basking in the delusions of grandeur attributed to his ambitious India Bill of 1783.¹⁰ Another print, probably also contemporary with our etching, depicts Fox with a loop of intestine protruding from his side, ruptured by his excessive efforts "to cajole the Westminster Electors": "*altho' several medical people of [no?] little fame were called in, B[romfiel]d with the rest declared it a ruptured case and incurable*".¹¹ The "Loosing of my Place" to which Fox refers in our print may refer either to the collapse of his coalition with Lord North or to Fox's anticipated losing of the Westminster election.

The song which Rowlandson puts into Fox's mouth is an adaptation of a lyric written by Sir William D'avenant [Davenant] for his play *The Rivals* (performed 1667), in which the mad heroine Celia sings:

My lodging it is on the Cold ground,
and very hard is my fare,
But that which troubles me most, is
the unkindness of my dear¹²

³ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* (1743 version), I, 29–30 "Close to those walls where Folly holds her throne,/And laughs to think Monroe [*sic*] would take her down", and *Imitations of Horace*, Book II, Epistle II (1737), 70–71 "Sure I should want the Care of ten Monroes/If I would scribble, rather than repose".

⁴ Facsimile edition annotated and introduced by R. Hunter and I. Macalpine, *A treatise on madness by William Battie M.D. and Remarks on Dr. Battie's Treatise on madness by John Monro M.D.*, London. Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1962 (Psychiatric Monograph Series No. 3).

⁵ *Dr. Thomas Monro (1759–1833) and the Monro Academy*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1976.

⁶ Allderidge, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, p. 6.

⁷ J. S. Watson, *The reign of George III*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960, pp. 270–275.

⁸ *B.M. Cat. of sat.*, vol. VI, p. xvi.

⁹ *The Royal Kalendar*, London, Debrett, 1784.

¹⁰ *B.M. Cat. of sat.*, no. 6496.

¹¹ *B.M. Cat. of sat.*, no. 6497. William Bromfield was a surgeon to the Royal Household.

¹² [Sir William D'avenant], *The Rivals*, London, W. Cademan, 1668, p. 48, Act V, scene 1.

Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute Library

The history of this lyric explains how it came to be still current in 1784. In the first production of 1667, *Celania* was played by Mary (Moll) Davies, whose performance of the song gratified Charles II so warmly that “it raised her from her Bed on the Cold Ground, to a Bed Royal.”¹³ Later in the same year, Nell Gwyn retaliated when she played the part of the mad Mirida in the Hon. James Howard’s comedy *All mistaken, or the mad couple* at the Theatre Royal:¹⁴ her part contained a parody of the D’avenant lyric, here addressed to a character called Pinguester:

My lodging it is on the Cold Boards
And wonderful hard is my fare,
But that which troubles me most is
The Fatness of my dear¹⁵

The original lyric was subsequently reprinted in anthologies, and *All mistaken* was included in Robert Dodsley’s selection of old plays (1744, reprinted 1780 etc.).

Rowlandson’s etching is therefore political propaganda expressed in terms of contemporary psychiatric practice, drawing in addition on the theatrical convention of madness on the Jacobean and Restoration stage. But there is still more to it than that. For in what circumstances did Rowlandson have the opportunity of observing and recording the appearance of Dr Monro? There seems to be no evidence to show that Rowlandson attended Monro’s haunts, the Royal College of Physicians, Bethlem, or his private asylum at Hackney. But Monro and Rowlandson did have in common the habit of collecting Old Master prints. Rowlandson gathered over five thousand European prints, which were sold at Sotheby’s after his death.¹⁶ Monro’s collection, also eventually dispersed at Sotheby’s,¹⁷ was especially notable for its rare impressions of early Italian engravings. It was access to Monro’s collection that provided Joseph Strutt with material for the earlier period in his pioneer history of engraving.¹⁸ The choicest item in Monro’s collection was a set of eight Florentine astrological engravings depicting the planets, the months, and the calendar: dated 1465, they are among the earliest Italian engravings, and the Monro set, now in the British Museum, is still the only complete set known.¹⁹ Monro, then, was, with Mead, Sloane, and William Hunter, one of the medical connoisseurs: like Rowlandson, he must have frequented the cabinets of collectors, print-shops, and auction-rooms where Old Master prints could be bought.

This supposition provides the key to a further layer of meaning in the present

¹³ John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus* (1708), cited in Sir W. D’avenant, *The shorter poems, and songs from the plays and masques*, edited by A. M. Gibbs, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, p. xxxvi.

¹⁴ Arthur M. Nethercot, *Sir William D’avenant*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1967, p. 390.

¹⁵ Hon. James Howard, *All mistaken, or the mad couple*, London, H. Brugis for J. Magnes, 1672, p. 54, Act V.

¹⁶ John Riely, ‘Rowlandson and the connoisseurs’, *Burlington Magazine*, March 1982, 129: supplement pp. 12–17.

¹⁷ Hunter and Macalpine, op. cit., note 4 above, p. 19.

¹⁸ J. Strutt, *A biographical dictionary . . . to which is prefixed an essay on the rise and progress of the art of engraving*, 2 vols., London, J. Davis for R. Faulder, 1785–6, vol. 1, pp. 23, 25–29.

¹⁹ A. M. Hind, *Early Italian engraving*, part 1, vol. 1, London, Quaritch, 1938, pp. 77–83. Hind records five sets which lack only one of the eight prints. He also states that the complete Monro set came from the collection of Dr Thomas Monro, and Richard Fisher, *Introduction to a catalogue of the early Italian prints in the British Museum*, London, the Trustees, 1886, p. 50, says the same. Yet Strutt’s reference, in 1785, to its being “in the collection of Dr. Monro” must refer to Dr John Monro.

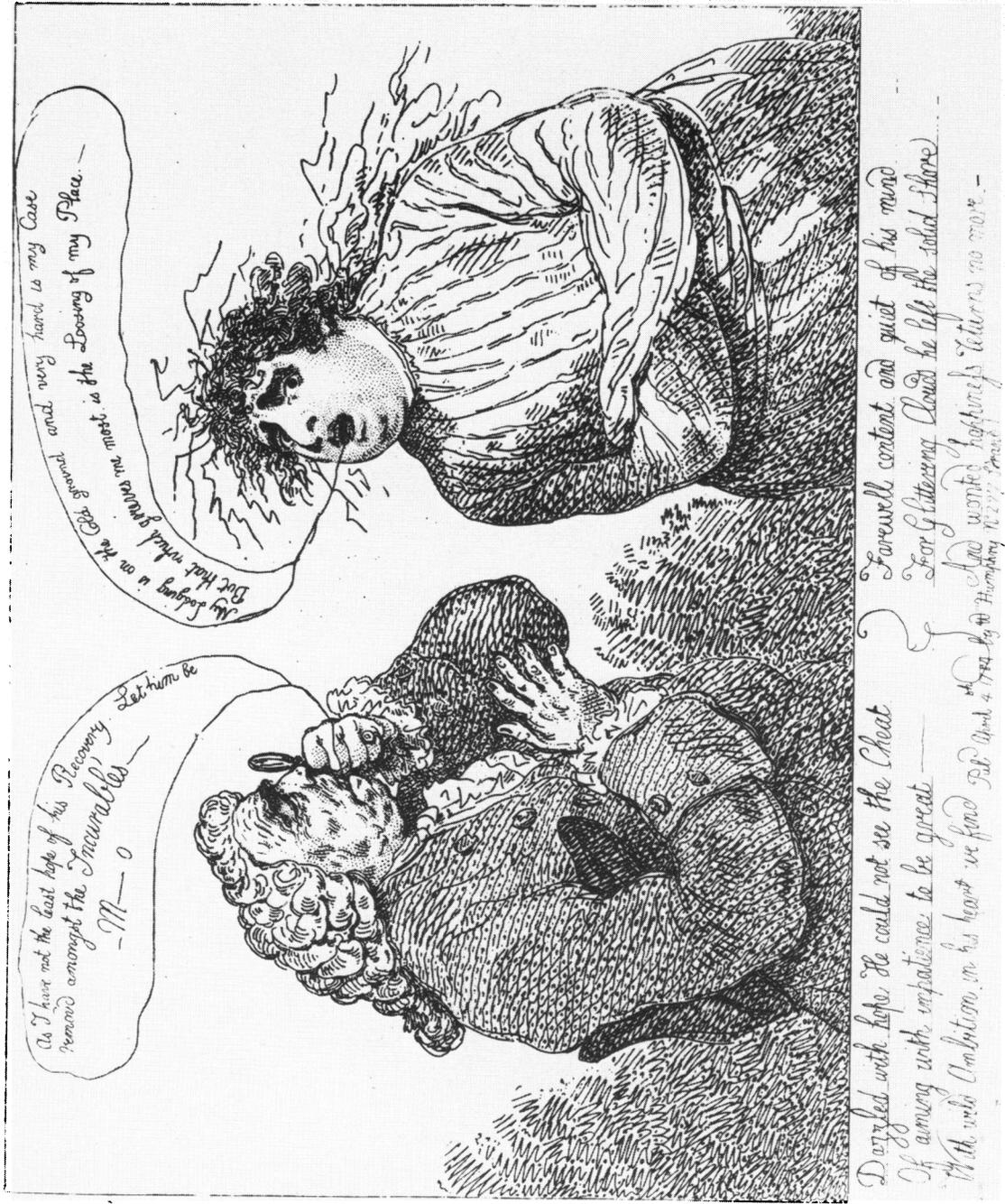


Figure 1. Caricature of John Monro MD and Charles James Fox. Etching attributed to Thomas Rowlandson, 4 April 1844. 25 x 30.8 cms. Wellcome Institute Library, London.



Figure 2. Portrait of John Monro, MD. Oil painting by Nathaniel Dance, signed and dated 1769. 75.5 x 63.5 cms. Royal College of Physicians, London.

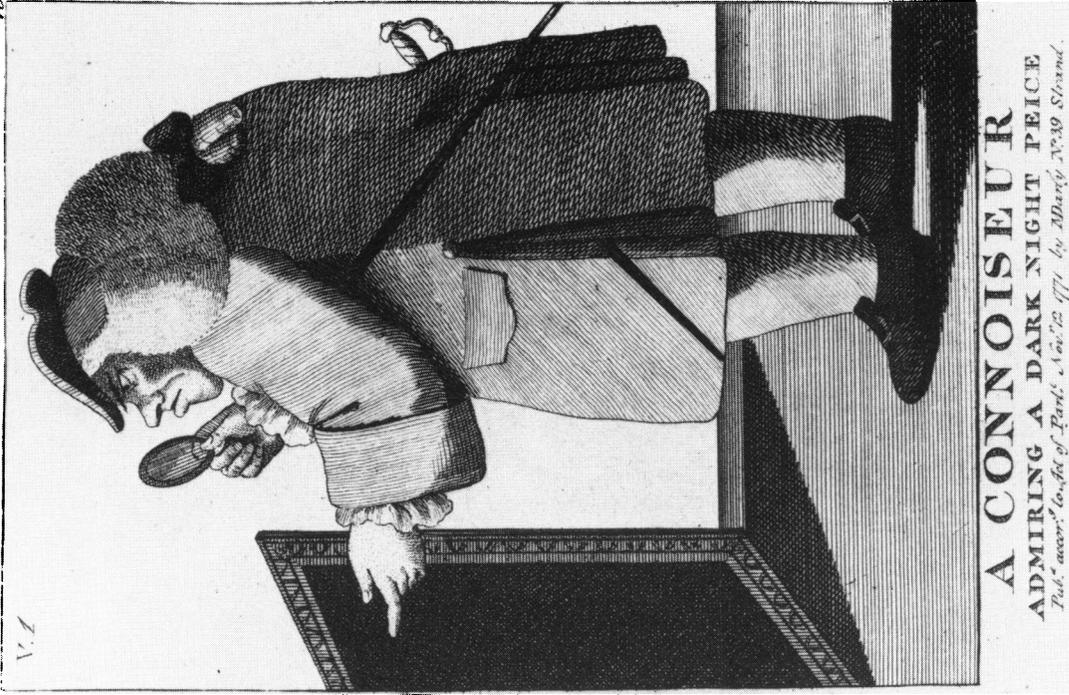


Figure 3. 'A Connoisseur admiring a dark night peice'. Engraving by Matthew Daryl, 12 November 1771, 15.9 x 10.3 cms. Wellcome Institute Library, London. The "Connoisseur" is using a quizzing-glass.

etching. Rowlandson portrays John Monro using a quizzing-glass²⁰ in order to diagnose incurable insanity in Charles James Fox. But in our only written record of a professional encounter between Monro and a lunatic, there is no mention of visual examination. Rather, Monro conversed with his patient with the evident intention of allowing him to reveal his state of mind: “they addressed one another in a complaisant way”, “they talked together in a familiar manner”, “they conversed together in a very friendly manner”.²¹ In such a situation the quizzing-glass would have revealed nothing. But in the viewing-rooms at Christie’s or Sotheby’s, or at Greenwood’s candle-lit auctions, elderly connoisseurs such as Dr Monro would certainly use a quizzing-glass when inspecting the fine gravure of an admired (or a suspect) impression. Matthew Darly had already engraved such a scene in 1771 (Fig. 3), Rowlandson himself depicted it no less than eleven times,²² and the tradition was continued in such prints as Louis-Léopold Boilly’s lithograph *Les antiquaires*.²³

Here, then, the politician Fox, portrayed as a madman, is inspected as if he were a rare Quattrocento print, while the mad-doctor Monro is portrayed as arch-connoisseur of lunacy, whose expert eye elicits a definitive diagnosis.

²⁰ On the meanings of this term see Richard Corson, *Fashions in eyeglasses*, London, Peter Owen, 1967, pp. 79–83.

²¹ Alexander Cruden, *The adventures of Alexander the Corrector*. London, the author, 1754, pp. 14, 20, 22.

²² Riely, *op. cit.*, note 16 above.

²³ Reproduced by Pierre Marly, *Les lunettes*, [s.l.], Atelier Hachette, 1980, p. 81.

News, Notes and Queries

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

The British Society for the History of Medicine was founded in 1965 in order to represent, on a national scale, the many British societies and groups involved in the history of medicine and, in particular, to represent British medical historians at the International Society for the History of Medicine (founded in 1921), which is responsible for organizing the biennial International Congresses.

Since 1973, the activities of the British Society for the History of Medicine have been at low ebb but recently there has been a revival of interest. On 20 November 1982, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Society was held at the Royal Society of Medicine, at which all the major organizations concerned with medical history in the British Isles were represented. It was agreed to reconstitute the Society, which will in future consist only of federal members (the constituent societies and groups) but not individual members.

An Executive Committee was formed and the following officers were elected: President – Dr F. F. Cartwright; Vice-President – Dr K. D. Keele; Honorary Secretary – Dr A. Sakula; National Delegate – Dr J. Cule; Treasurer – Major C. O’Leary. Correspondence to the Honorary Secretary should be addressed to him c/o Faculty of the Soc. of Apothecaries, Apothecaries’ Hall, Blackfriars Lane, London EC4V 6EJ.