

Mad Maudlin's Search

Tom O' Bedlam is the name of a critically acclaimed anonymous poem written circa 1600 about a former inmate of the Bethlem Royal Hospital for the insane. It was a popular enough ballad that another poem of 25 verses was written in reply, "Mad Maudlin's Search" or "Mad Maudlin's Search for Her Tom of Bedlam" and published in 1720. Folk rock band Steeleye Span set this poem to music on the 1971 album Please to See the King and Jolie Holland recorded a version on her 2004 album Escondida. We don't sing all 25 verses ...

For to see Mad Tom of Bedlam,
Ten thousand miles I'd travel.
Mad Maudlin goes on dirty toes,
To save her shoes from gravel

Chorus

*Still I sing bonny boys, bonny mad boys,
Bedlam boys are bonny,
For they all go bare, and they live by the air,
And they want no drink nor money.*

I went down to Satan's Kitchen
To get me food one morning
And there I got souls piping hot
All on the spit a-turning

Chorus

There I picked up a cauldron
Where boiled ten thousand harlots
Though full of flame I drank the same
To the health of all such varlets

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My staff has murdered giants
And my bag a long knife carries
To cut mince pies from children's thighs,
With which to feed the fairies
Chorus

The spirits white as lightning
Will on my travels guide me
The stars would shake and the moon would quake
Whenever they espied me
Chorus

No gypsy, slut nor doxy
Shall win my Mad Tom from me
I'll weep all night and the stars I'll fight
The fray will well become me.
Chorus

And when that I have murdered
The man in the moon to a powder
His staff I'll break and his dog I'll bake
Then howl no demon louder
Chorus