

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. Found in D'Urfey, Wit and Mirth or Pills to Purge Melancholy (1719-1720) Vol 4 pp.189-190⁵. Roud V53999.

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

Chorus}

<more>

⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Wit_and_Mirth,_or_Pills_to_Purge_Melancholy,_Volume_4.djvu&page=201

This 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

