The Politics of Madness: Government in the Reigns of Charles VI and Henry VI

By Sarah Alger BA

A thesis submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History
School of History and Classics
University of Tasmania
July 2001
Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks must go to the following people, whose indispensable assistance has made this thesis possible:

To Professor Michael Bennett for his eternally patient, constructive and insightful supervision, without which this thesis would not have been achievable.

To Doctor Megan Cassidy-Welch for her assistance whilst Professor Bennett was on leave in 2000.

To Doctor Chris Williams from the Psychology Department, who helped me to understand the psychological aspects of Charles VI and Henry VI’s cases.

To Jenny Alger for her help in translating sections of the *Chroniques du Religieux de Saint Denis* and *Histoire de Charles VI*, without which my primary sources regarding Charles VI would have been insufficient.

To my proof readers and critics, Roland Alger, Jenny Alger and Kristy Willson-Alger, without whom this thesis would be littered with errors.

To Andrew Richardson for proof reading my appendices and doing many other tedious tasks, for the use of his computer when mine crashed and for his unswerving support.

To my niece Hazel for providing many hours of welcome distraction and stress relief.

Special thanks must also go to my Honours colleagues whose bizarre behaviours made the stresses of the year easier to bear.

Finally my gratitude must go to my family and friends whose unstinting tolerance and understanding has helped me through this intense experience.
Contents

Introduction – p. 1

Chapter One: The Problems of Personality – p. 10

Chapter Two: Mental Illness and the Stresses of Kingship: A Nexus – p. 26

Chapter Three: The Struggle for Stability – p. 42

Conclusion – p. 59

Appendix 1: The Treaty of Troyes, 1420 – p. 62

Appendix 2: The Appointment of the Duke of York, 1454 – p. 68

Bibliography – p. 72
List of Illustrations


List of Illustrations


In the hot summer of 1453, King Henry VI went mad. Staying at his hunting lodge, Clarendon Palace, outside Salisbury, he slumped like a sack into a catatonic stupor, his eyes downcast, apparently unable or unwilling to speak or move. And he stayed that way for 17 months. Johnson nevertheless points out that Charles’s symptoms were different from Henry’s. By the time Henry lapsed into madness, all this apart from the toehold of Calais had been lost. Restored to some sort of health, Henry promptly dismissed the Duke of York, who had effectively taken control of the kingdom, and restored Somerset to his role in government. Open warfare soon followed between the two rival branches of the Plantagenet clan.