80th Anglo-American Conference 2011:
Health in History

– Panel Proposal –

Representations of Mental Illness in England and France,
12th-19th Centuries

Paper One: Anne E Bailey, University of Oxford

Manic Madmen and Moody Maidens: Hagiographical Perceptions of Mental Illness in Twelfth-Century England

Paper Two: Wendy J Turner, Augusta State University

Shifting Social and Medical Conceptualizations of the Mentally Impaired as Sinner and Saint becoming Derogatory Name-Calling and Scientific Quandary with the change from Late Medieval to Early Modern England

Paper Three: Janet Rose, Independent Scholar


Paper Three: Katherine Rawling, Royal Holloway, University of London

Patient Portraits: Images of Mental Illness, 1880-1910

Panel Abstract
This panel offers four historical perspectives on mental illness, looking at the different ways in which contemporary viewers were invited to interpret ideas about madness between the 12th and 19th centuries. The first paper examines early medieval perceptions as illustrated by the medico-religious genre of hagiography. The second paper moves to the late medieval and early modern period to chart changing attitudes towards mental impairment in the 15th and 16th centuries. The third and fourth papers turn to the 19th century. Whilst the third explores the impact of Victorian mass print media on popular ideas about religious mania and hysteria, the final paper considers visual representations of the mentally ill, and discusses how photographic images interacted with medical practice in the late nineteenth century.
**Manic Madmen and Moody Maidens:**

*Hagiographical Perceptions of Mental Illness in Twelfth-Century England*

The first paper in this panel offers a view of mental illness through medieval hagiography. Hagiography was a religious genre, generated by monastic cult centres for the purpose of commemorating and promoting the virtues of favoured saints. An important component of the genre was the posthumous miracle story. Often compiled as lengthy collections, miracle stories describe the illnesses and disabilities of pilgrims seeking cures at local shrines. Mental illnesses feature quite prominently, providing valuable clues as to how these conditions were encountered and perceived in the Middle Ages.

The paper examines evidence from a range of miracle collections compiled in twelfth-century England. These sources are particularly striking for the way in which they interweave religious and medical beliefs. Once depicted in terms of demonic possession, the mentally ill of hagiography can now be set within a broader explanatory framework reflecting the intellectual climate of the time.

The paper begins by looking at how and why hagiographers chose to interpret madness as a medico-religious phenomenon. It focuses on two case studies taken from the *Miracles of St Frideswide*. The first is the story of a ‘manic madman’ who exhibits classic symptoms of demonic possession. Despite the scriptural allusion, demons are absent from the narrative, and events are given a medical gloss. The second case study is that of a ‘moody maiden’: a young lady with a troubled home life who tries to drown herself in a local mill stream. Although presented as a form of madness, her symptoms are markedly different from that of the manic frenzy described in the first story. Moreover, the demonic element has become largely metaphorical. The girl is not possessed, in the conventional sense, but is shown to be haunted by her own internal demons.

It could be assumed that the ‘manic madman’ and ‘moody maiden’ of the Frideswide collection conform to later gender stereotypes of mania and melancholia. Mania and melancholia also had class connotations. Even in the Middle Ages, manic madness was linked to the brutish peasantry, while melancholia was imagined to haunt the effeminate elite. The second part of the paper looks more closely at gender and class with respect to miracle evidence. Analysing data from ninety case studies, it determines whether or not the narratives imply that there were certain ‘types’ of individuals predisposed to mental illness. This reveals that the proportion of men and women with mental health problems in the sources is roughly equal. There are, nevertheless, some notable differences including the apparent susceptibility of young women and monks to melancholic symptoms. The paper concludes by putting these findings into their contemporary cultural context, and reflects upon what these narratives suggest about the reality of, and attitudes towards, mental illness in twelfth-century England.
Late medieval images in literary and ecclesiastical works depicted mad persons either as good individuals with protection by God with saintly madness or an innocent attacked by devils, or conversely as bad individuals whom God had punished with insanity or had allowed to be attacked by demons or devils. This two-fold artistic and literary image of the mad, especially those afflicted with fury, remained relatively constant throughout the Middle Ages. At the same time, legal and medical personnel dealing with the mentally incapacitated rarely used these images, describing the incapacitated more realistically as having certain problems with memory, thinking, or perception.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the binary depiction and the treatment collided as social stigma of mental illness grew. The social labels attached to the mentally incapacitated became increasingly negative, and English society rejected the mentally impaired as unwanted elements of the community. This growing trend manifested in a decreased use of guardianship for mentally disabled heirs in favor of neglect and even incarceration. Toward the end of the fifteenth century and on into the sixteenth, the mentally incompetent were not only skipped over as heirs, but also derided as a taint upon a family. A late fifteenth-century example sums up this opinion: “I will that [under no circumstances is] one [who is an] idiot or fool occupy the said goods, but refuse him and take another that is next, [that] the said name of Baret may continue goodly as long as God vouches safe [for the family]” (Wills and Inventories, ed. Tymms). Other comments on legal and socially accepted behavior carry this same attitude. One example is the late fifteenth century legal explanation on cases of defamation: “If a man calls me ‘fool,’ ‘madman,’ ‘lunatic,’ ‘niggard’ or ‘glutton,’ I will nevertheless not have an action on the case for this. ... But if a man says to a miller that he is accustomed to take excessive tolls, upon this he will have an action on the case” (Select Cases on Defamation, ed. Helmholz).

This paper will look at the late medieval changes in attitude toward the mentally ill and incompetent through a variety of sources. It will compare these representations with what medieval and early modern physicians considered the source of mental afflictions. In conclusion, it will find that perceptions and depictions of the mentally incapacitated changed from the beginning of the fifteenth century when compared with those of the middle of the sixteenth century both publicly and privately in England, which had some side effects on the medical treatment of the mentally ill.
The third paper in this panel explores nineteenth-century views on the relationship between madness and heterodox spirituality. It focuses upon popular representations of religious mania and religious hysteria in Victorian mass print media, particularly newspapers. Journalists recorded the mental-health assessments of individuals holding heterodox beliefs and the incarceration of some in asylums, whilst speculating freely upon the sanity, or insanity, of those involved. Newspaper articles fuelled the controversy that surrounded such cases, whilst members of the public engaged enthusiastically in the debate through the correspondence pages of local and national papers.

This paper will commence with a brief discussion of heterodox religious belief in Victorian society. Forms of heterodox spiritual expression, such as charismatic millenarianism or Spiritualism, not only questioned accepted religious doctrine but challenged social norms through the permission of alternative lifestyles and behaviour offensive to respectable Victorian society. The paper will show that an effective way to negate these challenges was by demonstrating that those who claimed such gifts were mad. A diagnosis of insanity, followed by immediate incarceration in a lunatic asylum, posed a real risk to proponents of heterodox spiritual beliefs.

In order to demonstrate this phenomenon, the paper will highlight the experience of one alternative religious movement, the English Shakers, and the cases of two female leaders apprehended and assessed on charges of insanity. Mary Ann Girling, the leader of the sect, was arrested and examined by magistrates in a hearing designed to determine her sanity, but turned the tables on her interrogator and launched an impressive verbal assault upon him. She went free, declared to be sane. Julia Wood, a wealthy benefactor, was assessed privately by a doctor, found to be mad and dragged physically from her dwelling to be incarcerated in an asylum. Both cases were reported in the local and national press, both were highly controversial, and both produced considerable speculation on the mental health of the women involved.

Wood’s case, in particular, generated public interest on a national scale. Wood had dabbled in Spiritualism then crossed the Atlantic to spend time with the American Shakers, before becoming involved with the English Shakers upon her return. The paper will examine the controversy surrounding the medical diagnosis of Wood, which was based on a perfunctory interview by one doctor and an even more perfunctory visual examination by a second doctor. Despite the subsequent interest of journalists, Lunacy Law reformers and questions raised in Parliament, Wood remained incarcerated for the rest of her life.

The paper will go on to elucidate the way in which the mental health of both women was viewed through the Victorian mass print media. Their disputed sanity was scrutinised by a public hungry for salacious detail and keen to make value judgements about their respectability and life choices. Much of the reporting on the cases was sympathetic to the women involved and critical of the doctors who examined them. The paper will conclude, however, that positive reporting was largely ineffective in influencing the outcome of the cases and the high visibility facilitated by media interest was beneficial neither to the Shakers nor the doctors involved.
By the late nineteenth century photography was becoming increasingly accessible, used to record an infinite number of situations and environments. Commercial photography studios populated the streets of Britain whilst amateur domestic photography was gaining in popularity, with individuals creating personal albums of family and friends. The photographic portrait therefore was becoming an increasingly common cultural and material object, within reach of many and recognisable by all. But almost since its invention, photography was used in medical, scientific and institutional contexts. By the late nineteenth century, the patient photograph had become an established part of institutional life. Hospital and asylum patients were photographed in a variety of ways and for many different reasons; to catalogue and record, to identify, to illustrate, to teach and to explain. Being photographed was also an important part of the institutionalisation process all patients had to undergo. Through patient photographs the individual was ‘named’ and identified as a patient or, in some cases, as an inmate.

The fourth paper in this panel will explore the ways in which photography was used to mark the boundaries between health and ill-health in medico-psychiatric discourse in Britain and France in the late nineteenth century. What did mental illness look like and how was it visualised? How was the visual used to diagnose, treat and construct mental illness and with what effects? What role did photographic technology play in medical practice? In what ways were “The Mad” represented and why? By using examples from a wide range of sources including asylum case books and medical journals different ‘styles’ of representation and visualisation will be discussed to illustrate the variety of ways in which the photographic image interacted with medical practice and discourse.

The paper will begin by offering a brief discussion of the origins of psychiatric photography including the work of Hugh W Diamond and Henry Hering. Then several types of patient photograph will be discussed including the conventional portrait, the clinical photo, the patient as specimen and the ‘mug-shot’ to emphasise the variety of ways the mentally ill were represented and the relative effects of each model. Finally it will be suggested how these images might be understood and interpreted and what they might tell us about mental health and illness in the late nineteenth century.