
Reviewed by Morag Allan Campbell (Independent Scholar)

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Commissioned by Iain C. Hutchison (University of Glasgow)

Out of His Mind, published as part of the Manchester University Press Gender in History series, turns attention to “madmen in the attic” during the period from 1845 until the First World War. Amy Milne-Smith, associate professor of history at Wilfrid Laurier University, seeks to address a “lopsided” historiography that has tended to concentrate on madness among Victorian women (p. 5). Although women did tend to outnumber men in public asylums at any given time, this did not represent “a plague of women being locked away by a misogynistic culture” (p. 26). The fact that women tended to live longer meant that they might linger within the asylum, while male patients dominated military and criminal institutions.

Out of His Mind explores the consequences and meanings of a diagnosis of insanity for a man and his family, and how it was perceived among the wider society in which he lived during this period. A man who was not in control of himself, of his emotions and impulses, who had ceased to be able to administer his finances or govern his family, was in many ways “no longer a man” (p. 2). This, Milne-Smith claims, was of particular significance during the nineteenth century as lack of control became “increasingly pathologized” (p. 2). By the end of the century, there was a general belief that “British men were not what they used to be,” closely related to degeneration theories and fears about inherited disease (p. 221).

Citing as inspiration the approach of historians such as R. A. Houston in focusing on madness as a social construction seen in relation to social “expectations about normality,” Milne-Smith aims to “bridge the gap between cultural expectation and experience” (pp. 4, 8). That being so, Milne-Smith’s book is rather less dependent on institutional records and case notes than other works on the subject of insanity, although she makes good use of the records of Broadmoor Asylum, Bethlem Hospital, Glasgow Royal Lunatic Asylum, Manor House Asylum, Claybury Asylum, and Ticehurst House, as well as Lunacy Commission reports.

The study looks beyond the asylum walls to offer a more comprehensive view than can be de-
rived from medical texts and case notes, and the
strength of the work lies in the variety of sources
used. *Out of His Mind* references an impressive
list of newspaper accounts, with extensive mining
of the British Newspaper Archive and court re-
cords accessed through Old Bailey Proceedings
Online, as well as a range of printed primary
sources including works of popular fiction. As the
author notes, "the source base is thus quite exten-
sume, if not exhaustive" (p. 10).

These sources are used to particularly good ef-
fect in the latter section of the book, which ex-
ploring public debates and conversations sur-
rounding male insanity. Here Milne-Smith applies
the concept of moral panic, more commonly used
in more modern contexts, to explore popular nar-
ratives of male insanity. Then, as now, sensational
stories sold newspapers, and editors did not hesit-
ate to assign the insanity label in instances of ex-
reme behavior and violence. Such stories per-
petuated and reinforced stereotypes about male
madness and violence, and reflected wider con-
cerns and fears held by society. For instance, stor-
ies about a perceived danger of madmen striking
inside the confines of enclosed railway carriages,
made mad by the movement of the train itself,
echoed fears about technological change and the
accelerating pace of everyday life.

*Out of His Mind* contributes to the recent,
growing scholarship on the history of disability
and mental health. Milne-Smith’s approach, focusing on cultural understandings, offers a wider pic-
ture than the study of medical observations in
case notes and judicial records alone. The chapter
on media panics is especially rich in this respect,
with fascinating glimpses into popular understand-
ing of male madness in the nineteenth cen-
tury and the driving concerns of the time. Milne-
Smith’s range of sources make this work a compel-
ling read.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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