

### 3. Bedlam

#### The home of the mad



Bedlam was, in its time, a modern institution that specialized in the treatment of mental illness. When we now look back at the way they treated their patients, it seems like a brutal institution that perhaps did more harm than good. This centre for madness became a source of inspiration for a lot of artists, and Purcell and d'Urfey was no exception. It is not difficult to see why they would choose this particular institution for inspiration, as it was in their own country, and the fact that the institution kept its doors open for the public until 1770 (Scull, 2015).

According to A. Scull in the book “Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity from the Bible to Freud, from Madhouse to Modern Medicine”, mental illness is now a day generally explained as some sort of chemical imbalance in the body of a patient, or that there is something physically wrong with the way the brain or body works. In the past however, this was not the explanations for the erratic behaviour. Scull also goes on to explain that before they started looking inwards for an explanation, they thought that external factors were the reason for the madness. Before Purcell and d'Urfeys time of composing and writing, the most common reason for madness was believed to be possession by the devil or a punishment from God for bad behaviour. This trend was still going strong in Purcell and d'Urfeys time, but now people also thought that extreme displays of feelings when it came to heartbreak, loss of money or status, and incurable deceases were indicators of madness. Madness was, in the time of Purcell and d'Urfey divided in to two categories; the flamboyant and aggressive madness and the restrained and melancholic madness (Scull, 2015). According to the musicologist Curtis A. Price, Bedlam was the most likely inspiration for Purcell and d'Urfeys “Mad songs” (Price, 1984), and I will now provide some insight into how Bedlam was operated and how those who were admitted there were treated.

Bedlam was a mental hospital established in 1330's and was the first of its kind in Europe. The hospital has been moved three times. In the 1300's it was near Bishopsgate just outside London, before it in the 1600's was moved to Moorfields, then to St George's Fields in

Southwark in the 1800's, before it finally, in 1930, was moved to Monks Orchard in West Wickham. They specialized in mental illness, and experimented in different treatment methods (Scull, 2015). They often used very physical ways of treating the patients, and in the 1900's lobotomy was a normal form of treatment (Trainor, 2012). The numerous and cruel stories from this hospital has been the inspiration for many books, movies, TV-series and music.

The word Bedlam in itself means fuss or confusion (Scull, 2015), which I believe is appropriate for the institution that in the world of psychiatry have one of the perhaps worst history of abuse and terrible treatments in Europe. Based on what we now regard as "madness" it did not take much to end up at Bedlam. Some causes of hospitalization could be extreme heartbreak, modern political thinking, extreme religiosity, but also physical illness that doctors could not find the cause or treatment for (Trainor, 2012).

Patients were allowed to have visits from family and friends, and in the case that the patient was poor it was expected that the family provided food, clothing and other things he or she might need to survive. One of the things Bedlam is known for is allowing visits from people who had no form of connection to the patients to observe them, for an admissions fee. The earliest evidence we can find on this practice, are old papers from 1598 that tells in detail about a Lord who paid 10 shillings to be allowed to walk around the hospital looking at the mentally ill who were admitted there. This was one of the things they did to raise money for the daily operations of the institution. This way of showcasing the mentally ill, is seen by many as the most scandalous in Bedlams history (Chambers, 2009). It was also during this period Bedlam was first used as a backdrop to a story as "The Honest Whore, Part 1" was published in 1604 (Scull, 2015).

In 1770, it was no longer possible for anyone to pay to visit patients. Now you would have to show a letter with the signature from the governor to go to Bedlam, other than that only next of kin was allowed to visit. In retrospect, one can see clear advantages and disadvantages both in the open and the closed Bedlam. P. Chambers (2009) writes about many stories of abuse of patients, conducted by both employees and visitors. However, when it was open there was to some extent openness about the treatment that was used. This meant that the people who visited could make objections and reactions to treatments. When Bedlam was closed to visitors, there was no longer anyone in the public who looked after those admitted. It became

much easier for employees to expose patients to serious assault and experimental treatments. It is during this period one finds the worst examples of patient abuse (Chambers, 2009).

Even though the perception of madness has changed a lot, there are still some things that can be compared to the madhouses of the old days. We still incarcerate people that should have gotten treatment and care, instead of solitary confinement and punishment, because people are misdiagnosed and denied proper treatment (Hoffman & Kiehl, 2014).