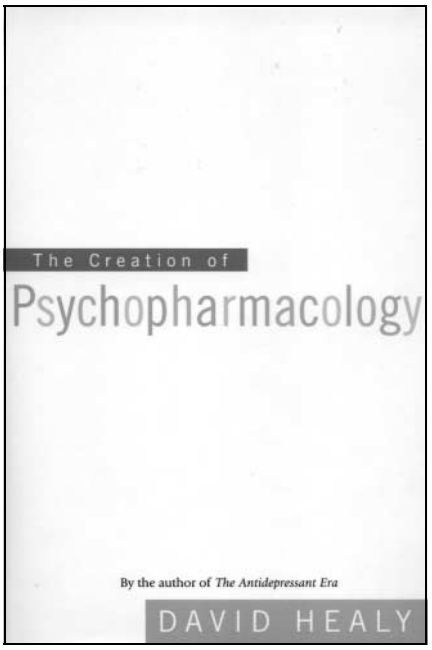
Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

The Creation of Psychopharmacology

By David Healy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2002. 480 pp. £26.50 (hb). ISBN 0 674 00619 4



Psychiatrists and historians owe a debt to David Healy. Over the years he has conducted interviews with all the leading figures in psychopharmacology. The resultant three volumes of *The Psychopharmacologists* (Healy, 1996, 1998, 2000) captured a crucial period in the history of psychiatry. Drawing on these interviews and his wide reading of the scholarly literature, Healy has now constructed a subtle and compelling narrative of the development of psychotropic drugs, in particular of chlorpromazine, whose discovery he hails as as important as that of penicillin.

This is not a narrow, internalist account of events. Rather, Healy ambitiously relates the emergence of drugs to the wider culture and shows how the two have interacted. He begins with the new science of the Enlightenment; looks at the changing clientele of 19th-century asylums; examines the counterculture's advocacy of LSD (acid) in the 1960s; charts the growth of the mighty drug companies of today; and, finally, considers what biomedical advances hold for the future of humanity. En route, he boldly challenges received readings of the past and the accepted wisdom about psychiatric drugs. For example, he demonstrates that lithium was first prescribed in the 19th century and that the pre-neuroleptic era, far from representing some kind of 'dark age', witnessed the development of several effective treatments. With regard to recent times, Healy judges that the evidence that the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (the SSRIs) and the 'atypical' antipsychotics are superior to older drugs is weak.

Healy asks how we arrived at our present position. It is a position, he suggests, where biological explanations of mental disorder and, indeed, of an increasing proportion of human behaviour are now in the ascendancy; where powerful drug corporations shape how we perceive and classify emotional distress; and where the 'psychopharmaceutical complex' ensures that the only therapy considered is medication. For Healy, the key lies with the discovery of chlorpromazine. The advent of this drug in the 1950s saw many patients 'awake' from their psychoses and leave the asylum. Thus was community psychiatry born: as a result, clinicians began to see an increasing number of patients with non-psychotic disorders. In North America, the therapeutic triumph of chlorpromazine dealt a deathblow to psychoanalysis, and medication became the treatment of choice not only for severe mental illness, but for all types of psychic distress. Psychiatry underlined its commitment to a biomedical perspective with the publication of DSM–III in 1980. In tandem, drug companies created markets for their products rather than creating medication in response to the needs of patients. Healy maintains that we are becoming *less* rather than more rational in our development of new treatments. Science does not evolve progressively in response to carefully conducted research; instead, serendipity plays a major role, leaving scientists to construct a *post hoc* theory to accommodate the new data.

Healy places his treatise in a wider philosophical framework. He contends that our views about the nature of humans have changed dramatically and that a 'new biomedical self' is being born. He follows its conception during the time of the Enlightenment, when God was dethroned and La Mettrie postulated that man is a machine, to its birth in the present day when, in the eyes of many, the neurosciences and the Human Genome Project are demonstrating that notions of spirituality and free will are redundant and that human beings can be understood entirely in terms of their biology. Since the Enlightenment, there have been many voices objecting to such a materialist view of man. From Thomas Reid in the 18th century; through Søren Kierkegaard and William James, to Francis Fukuyama in the present day, powerful arguments have been raised in opposition. Perhaps Healy does not give sufficient space to these dissenting voices. However, he has written a highly stimulating and original book, which is brimful of ideas and deserves to be read and debated throughout the psychiatric community and beyond.

Healy, D. (1996) *The Psychopharmacologists*. London: Chapman & Hall.

— (1998) *The Psychopharmacologists II*. London: Altman.

— (2000) *The Psychopharmacologists III*. London: Arnold.

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Every Family in the Land: Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination against People with Mental Illness

Edited by Arthur Crisp.
London: Sir Robert Mond Memorial Trust. 2001. Electronic book: 464 pp. Free on http://www.stigma.org/everyfamily
CD–ROM: £11.75. ISBN 0 9541314 0 1

This collection of over 80 learned articles, personal perspectives and commentaries is designed to shed light on the most common mental disorders in the hope of dispelling

some of the stigma which attaches to them. Produced as part of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' anti-stigma campaign 'Changing Minds', whose Chairman is the editor, it offers useful and often moving insights into the causes, experiences and misunderstanding of, and reactions to, what lies behind generic diagnoses such as personality disorder, schizophrenia, depression, dementia, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug misuse and the stigma that stems from the labels.

The joy and the novelty of this book is that it is freely available on the internet. Its scope is almost too large for a single book, so that the ability to search for the nuggets one wants rather than to start at the beginning and read to the end, is invaluable. Perhaps more importantly, although most of the articles will attract specialists in mental illness or those with experience of it, computerisation may tempt some of those less knowledgeable, who browse the internet as a pastime, to stray into the world of mental illness without the provocation of the sensationalist press, thus opening more minds to the realities rather than the myths of mental disorder.

A brief scan of the contents list highlights the way in which the diverse mass of material has been helpfully clustered together. Each chapter has a theme which relates to all or most of the illnesses in question, underlining the commonality of stigmatising or other assumptions about all types of mental illness. The history of stigmatisation, its origins and strategies to deal with it are three examples of this grouping. Separate chapters cover the law and mental illness, creativity and mental disorder, and spirituality and mental illness. For me as a non-specialist reader, the chapter which had the most impact was Chapter 2, in which courageous individuals give mind-opening personal descriptions of what it is like to live with various mental disorders, and those who love and care for them, as well as experts, describe the effect of stigma on their everyday lives. This chapter above all brings home the title of the book: *Every Family in the Land*. Yesterday, today or tomorrow, this might be your family. This book is available without cost as an invaluable resource to which you can turn at will.

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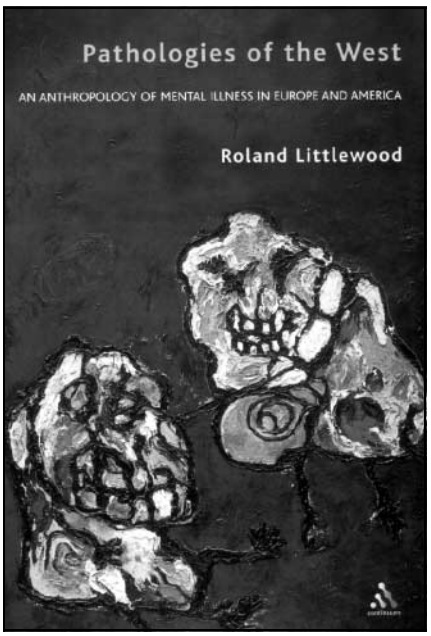
Pathologies of the West. An Anthropology of Mental Illness in Europe and America

By Roland Littlewood. London: Continuum. 2002. 286 pp. £65.00 (hb), £25 (pb). ISBN 0 8264 5815 7 (hb), 0 8264 5816 5 (pb)



Psychiatry could learn a great deal from social anthropology. Most English-speaking psychiatrists are trained and think largely in the languages of biology and pharmacology, and so do not find it easy to appreciate the complex influences of their patients' cultural backgrounds, assumptions and beliefs on the shifting ways in which they express their distress and their fears. As a result, we are often nonplussed by contemporary phenomena like myalgic encephalomyelitis and the Gulf War and total allergy syndromes. So there is plenty of scope for an anthropology text aimed at psychiatrists.

Sadly, this is not it. It is probably not written for psychiatrists, or even for doctors, and although Littlewood writes fluently it is heavy going. He writes sensibly enough about the cultural influences on the phenomena and the rising female incidence of parasuicide, agoraphobia, anorexia and obesity, but most of his comments are hardly original. Moreover, the bulk of the book is devoted to incest, military rape, domestic sieges and the links between late 19th-century French hysteria and late 20th-century American multiple personality disorder. His observations here are more interesting and, I would guess, more shrewd, but none of these phenomena is a key issue for busy National Health Service psychiatrists. If you are well-heeled and will not be put out by frequent references to instrumentality, mimesis and subdominance – and if you are familiar with symbolic inversions, transgressive arguments, reversal theory and contingent proximity – you might be fascinated to read this heavily referenced tome. But you will also be a fairly rare bird.

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Defining Psychopathology in the 21st Century. DSM–IV and Beyond

Edited by John E. Helzer & James J. Hudziak. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing. 2002. 272 pp. £49.00 (pb). ISBN 1 58562 063 7

The inspirational title of this book suggests that it was conceived in the after-glow of the millennium celebrations. Indeed, the editors have drawn on lectures given at the year 2000 American Psychopathological Association meeting of the same title. The book is dedicated to the life and work of Samuel B. Guze, who was presented with the Joseph Zubin award at the meeting: that was the last occasion on which many of his friends and colleagues saw him before his death.

One of the difficulties facing editors of conference proceedings is that they generally have less direct control over chapter topics and content than editors of other multi-author books such as textbooks. This often means that the final product resembles the 'curate's egg': it is good in parts. Fortunately, John Helzer & James Hudziak have avoided such problems and this egg is good throughout. They have produced a fine text that is both scholarly in content and exciting to read.

The contributions have been collected into four parts, the first entitled 'Definitional tensions'. A masterly opening chapter by Robert Kendell sets the current scene. This is followed by an intriguing dialogue between Professors Regier, Narrow, Wakefield & Spitzer about the methodological and definitional issues raised by large-scale epidemiological studies in the USA. The second part, 'Defining psychopathology', explores how functional imaging could be