

In court, Dadd claimed he was merely 'the cat's paw' in an 'act of volition', which could not be attributed to him, though he approved of the murder. He was initially admitted to Clermont Asylum north of Paris, before being transferred to Bethlem Asylum. In 1854 Dr Charles Hood, physician superintendent of the Bethlem, summarised Dadd's case:

'For some years after his admission he was considered a violent and dangerous patient, for he would jump up and strike a violent blow without any aggravation, and then beg pardon for the deed. This arose from some vague idea . . . that certain spirits have the power of possessing a man's body and compelling him to adopt a particular course whether he will or no' (p. 195).

From these sketchy details, most psychiatrists, if they were inclined to engage in retrospective diagnosis, would probably conclude that Dadd suffered from schizophrenia. Tromans remarks that Dadd received very little in way of 'treatment', but, if one wanted to defend the asylum, one could say that it both protected the general public from a dangerous patient and provided Dadd with the

facility to continue his work as an artist. Tromans notes that interest in Dadd has fluctuated over the years. After a long period of obscurity in the first half of the 20th century, Dadd enjoyed something of a revival in the 1960s when it seemed that he was on the verge of being recruited as a hero of counterculture, the mad artist whose work was a visionary riposte to the bourgeois order. Although Tromans is at pains to emphasise that he does not see Dadd as any kind of hero, it is to be hoped that his book and the astounding, high-quality reproductions that illustrate it, will inspire renewed interest in the work of this gifted if disturbing Victorian artist.

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