

**The portrayal of madness in the  
Limerick press 1772 – 1845**

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**2013**

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## **Abstract.**

This thesis examines the treatment of madness and the mad in the Irish provincial newspaper press between 1772 and 1843. It concentrates largely on the Limerick press, contextualising its treatment of the subject by reference to the Dublin press and contemporary publications.

The study focuses on the institutions established to cater for the mad, significant mad individuals of the period, the criminalisation of the affliction in the press, the 'othering' of the mad and madness, and the medicalization of the 'mad industry' over time.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have been indebted in the preparation of this thesis to my supervisor, Dr Maura Cronin, whose patience and kindness, as well as her academic expertise, has been invaluable to me. Maura was, and still is, a model supervisor, a fountain of knowledge and a friend.

I am extremely grateful to the staff of the libraries at Mary Immaculate College and the University of Limerick. The staff in Mary Immaculate College were always unhand to help with technical problems and to source hard to find articles and theses. I appreciated the help of the very patient and knowledgeable staff at the National Library of Ireland and the Royal Irish academy in Dublin. I was lucky to have been involved with the History Department in Mary Immaculate College and the encouragement of Dr Liam Chambers and the helpful guidance and advice of my fellow postgraduate students, Mick, Justin, Rob, Paul, John, Ursula, Caroline and Sarah has been valued.

The procedural guidance and supportive reassurance of Helen Gallagher and Jeanette Ferguson in the Postgraduate-studies office is also most appreciated. The informal support and encouragement of many friends has been indispensable, and I would like particularly to acknowledge John Harnett, Brian O'Donoghue, Ger O'Connor, Gary Flood, Chris Delooze, Damien Conway and Keith O'Donnell. Thank you for keeping me sane during a study of insanity. A special mention is reserved for Declan and Jeff Fitzgerald for helping to show me the sanity of violent actions.

My parents, Juliet MacMahon and John O'Neill, have been a constant source of support – emotional, moral and of course financial – during my postgraduate years, and this thesis would certainly not have existed without them. Finally I would like to thank Jimi and my younger brother Ciaran who has always been on-hand to help take my mind off the stresses of academic studies.

## Introduction:

In 1850, John Conolly, one of the most prolific nineteenth century authors on mental illness and also directly involved in the asylum network, wrote in his *Familiar views of lunacy and lunatic life*, addressed the general public as follows:

...it is a curious fact, that in these days, when information concerning other matters of importance has many easy and familiar modes of recommending itself to popular acceptance, the only way in which any special and continuous notice respecting this popular topic [insanity] finds entrance into the world is in the pages of a medical treatise, journal, or hospital report, which do not meet the eye of the major part of the community, or else of a parliamentary blue-book, distaste to the perusal of which is so well established as to be almost proverbial.<sup>1</sup>

Conolly's complaint that there was little or no information on madness as a medical condition is confirmed in the present study of the treatment of insanity in the Limerick provincial press in the nineteenth century. When these newspapers did discuss madness, they mainly discussed the individual rather than the affliction itself or the institutions that catered for the insane. The thesis examines the evolving treatment of madness and the mad in the Limerick newspaper press between 1772 and 1843. This subject was chosen because despite a now vast literature on the history of madness and psychiatry, we know little about representations of madness in print culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Newspapers were one of the most widely available and accessible (if ephemeral) print media and therefore, unlike literary and medical treatises, impacted on a broad social spectrum. Indeed, the fact that the newspapers were ephemeral meant that they reacted to events as they happened, and so provide a remarkable window into popular social

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<sup>1</sup> John Conolly, *Familiar views of lunacy and lunatic life: with hints on the personal care and management of those who are afflicted with temporary or permanent derangement* (London, 1850), p. v. Conolly was a significant contributor to the 1843 investigations into private madhouses in Ireland and the changes in legislation surrounding the criminal insanity defence in England in 1843. He also served as the head-physician to the Middlesex Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell and ran a private asylum.

attitudes in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Above all, there has been no study to date on the representation of madness in the provincial press in an Irish context.

This study examines the Limerick local press for references to ‘madness’ during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, using the newspaper as a barometer for recording changing attitudes and mind-sets in relation to insanity. It focuses on how madness was used to explain deviant actions, how it was sensationalised to whet the interest of the readership, and how the changing attitudes to the institutional care of the mad were reflected in the newspaper. The press of 1772-1843 was largely controlled by the protestant middle-classes and was a male dominated industry.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, religion, class and gender are some of the over-riding themes explored within this study of the representation of lunatics and lunacy in an Irish provincial newspaper.

Important developments occurred in the institutionalisation of and legislation regarding insanity in this period. The study opens in 1772 when the Limerick House of Industry was established, catering for a wide range of indigent groups including the lunatic poor. It closes in 1845, following the drafting of important legislation dealing with criminal lunatics and private asylums.<sup>4</sup> This period was significant in terms of changing medical and lay perceptions of madness and there were major changes in the legal frameworks surrounding lunacy and in the topography of the institutional landscape. The thesis uses these developments as a backdrop to an exploration of changing lay and medical perceptions of madness as reflected in the local press, examining editorials, reports of public and political events, accounts of sensational happenings, and advertisements. Limerick is a suitable focus for such a study since it

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<sup>2</sup> Archibald Alison, Scottish essayist and historian condemned in the locally available *Blackwood's Magazine* (sold by the proprietor of the *Limerick Chronicle*, Henry Watson, from his offices at Rutland St.) newspapers as ‘too deeply integrated with the passions, the interests and the errors of the moment’; Archibald Alison, ‘The copyright question’, in *Blackwood's Magazine* 51 (January 1842), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> R.B. McDowell, ‘Irish newspapers in the eighteenth century’ in *The crane bag*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1984) p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> 1838 (1 & 2 Vict. c. 27) *The Criminal Lunatics (Ireland) Act*; 1845 (302) *Criminal lunatics (Ireland). A bill for the establishment of a central asylum for insane persons charged with offences in Ireland, and to amend the act relating to the prevention of offences by insane persons, and the acts respecting asylums for the insane poor in Ireland, and for appropriating the lunatic asylum in the city of Cork to the purposes of a district lunatic asylum*; 1842 (504) *Lunatic asylums (Ireland). A bill [as amended by the committee] for amending the law relating to private lunatic asylums in Ireland*.

was an expanding centre, and one of its leading public men, Thomas Spring Rice, was a major instigator of legislative reform on behalf on the insane. Moreover, the local elite saw the city as a centre of progressive medical care, and its institutional topography in relation to insanity was changed in 1827 with the opening of the District Lunatic Asylum. This was the country's first large-scale provincial district asylum and was regarded in official circles as a model institution, though this confidence was not apparent in the local press, which concentrated more on the local House of Industry and locally instigated charities.

The present study, while contextualising the treatment of attitudes to insanity by reference to the Dublin press and contemporary publications, focuses mainly on the Limerick press, which was well-developed by the end of the eighteenth century. No historical study to date has considered how the Irish newspaper press portrayed madness and the mentally ill.<sup>5</sup> The present thesis attempts to fill this vacuum in the Limerick context, being constructed in the first instance around reports of madness that appeared in the press of Limerick city and of other counties in the province, the Dublin press, and a sample of British and American newspapers. The *Limerick Chronicle* and the *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin) are at the core of this study as they were both newspapers were continuously available and had relatively high circulation figures throughout the time period under discussion.<sup>6</sup> Along with these two main

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<sup>5</sup> Karla Duffy, 'Mad or bad? The portrayal of the mentally ill in Irish print media', Unpublished M.A. thesis (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2011). Duffy investigates the portrayal of the mentally ill in current twenty-first century media outlets.

<sup>6</sup> Circulation figures were a debated issue. For instance the *Limerick Herald* attempted to justify its rather poor sales by claiming that the figures for the *Limerick Chronicle* include stamps supplied to another (un-named) paper and that the Dublin and cork papers were usually sold three times a week and that this resulted in skewed figures. The *Herald* went onto claim that the figures published regarding their first year of operation only covered eight months of the year and that should one expand these figures to cover twelve months then one would see that the *Herald's* sales were on a par with the *Chronicle*. By 1792 Andrew Watson claimed in an advertisement that he had experienced a 'vast increase' in the number of subscribers and noted 'the extensive circulation of his paper was not only in this part of the Kingdom but also in several parts of England and Scotland.'; *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 December 1792 cited in Ursula Callaghan, 'Newspapers and print culture in eighteenth-century Limerick', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, 2010) p. 97. The *Chronicle* was easily the best selling paper in Limerick, selling on average C130, 000 units per year (1822-1836) and was on a par with the best-selling provincial papers in the larger urban areas of Belfast and Cork. Even in the more competitive marketplace of the 1830s the chronicle was selling over double the figures of its closest rival in Limerick, the *Herald*; 183,950: 90,858(1833/34).The *Freemans Journal* was consistently one of Dublin's best-selling newspapers, with circulation figures regularly exceeding 300,000 per year throughout the 1820s and 1830s though they did suffer a dip in sales from 1827-1829.

newspapers, additional long-running and successful Limerick, national and provincial publications were examined in order to provide a more rounded and balanced discussion – the *Limerick General Advertiser*, *Limerick Evening Post*, *Limerick Star*, *Limerick Times*, *Dublin Evening Mail*, *Dublin Evening Post*, *Nenagh Guardian* and the *Tipperary Free Press*.

The Dublin newspapers, especially the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Dublin Evening Post* were selected because of the different insights given by their competing points of view, especially noticeable in their coverage of the regency crisis. The *Dublin Evening Mail* was considered to be a suitable source as it was edited by Joseph Timothy Haydn, a Limerick-born editor who later returned to Limerick to publish a succession of newspapers that challenged the *Limerick Chronicle's* dominant position in the 1830s.<sup>7</sup> The *Limerick General Advertiser*, under the stewardship of Alexander MacDonnell, was the most consistently available rival publication within Limerick within the years under discussion. The *Tipperary Free Press* was selected as it was one of the few provincial newspapers aimed directly at Catholic readers and the *Nenagh Guardian* was its local closet rival in terms of sales. The *Waterford Chronicle* was the exception to the rule during the 1820s when its protestant proprietor, Pierce Barron, continually printed articles opposing the government.<sup>8</sup>

The ownership of a newspaper determined its reporting. This was especially the case in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when, despite legal restrictions on their production, newspapers were closely aligned with political interests.<sup>9</sup> The *Limerick Chronicle* is probably the most useful source in the present study. It was one of the best-selling Irish provincial papers and was controlled by

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<sup>7</sup>1826 (235) Newspapers (Ireland). *An account of the number of stamps issued to each newspaper in Ireland, in each year for the last five years ending 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1826*; 1829 (164) Newspapers (Ireland). *An account of the number of stamps issued to each newspaper in Ireland, in each year for the last three years ending 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1829*; 1830 (119) Newspaper stamps (Ireland) *An account of the number of stamps issued to each newspaper in Ireland, for one year ending 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1830*; 1834 (412) (510) Newspapers (Ireland). *An account of the number of stamps issued to each newspaper in Ireland respectively, from 5<sup>th</sup> January 1833 to 5<sup>th</sup> April 1834; and of the number of stamps cancelled by each newspaper in Ireland respectively, for the same period*. In order to be sold legally, newspapers had to be printed on stamped paper and all three of these metropolitan newspapers consistently accounted for the largest number of stamps issued in the capital.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Inglis, *Freedom of the press 1770-1840* (London, 1956), pp 198-199.

<sup>9</sup> Inglis, *Freedom*, pp 166-177, 187-190.

Andrew Watson, a prominent local businessman, a patron of numerous local charities, a member of the city's corporation, a governor of the local House of Industry, and who served twice as sheriff of the city.<sup>10</sup> Established in 1868, with two issues per week, the *Chronicle* circulated in Munster and Leinster and was available as far afield as Liverpool and the colonies.<sup>11</sup> Gibbons Merle, one-time editor of the London *Times*, wrote of the *Limerick Chronicle* that he had yet to come across a provincial paper so closely aligned with the local political elite. But he still considered it to be a newspaper of some merit since it was the first newspaper of the empire to receive the military news, before any of its Irish or British counterparts, and also due to the abundance of correspondence that its editor received from across the Empire.<sup>12</sup> Hazlitt concluded that while the *Chronicle* may not have been to everyone's taste, 'it sells more and contains more than any other [provincial] paper: and when you have said this you have said it all'.<sup>13</sup>

To a large extent the scope and range of topics discussed in the press depended on the individual commentator who had written a letter or article and sent it to the newspaper. Though other newspapers were an essential source for provincial editors, providing them with news drawn from a wider range of locations and sources than any one individual could access, so too were the items of personal correspondence sent to the paper, since these provided editors with news that they could claim to be exclusive.<sup>14</sup> Where possible, these contributors are identified throughout the study, although the use of pseudonyms and techniques of

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Potter, *The municipal revolution in Ireland: local government in cities and towns since 1800* (Irish Academic Press, 2010), p.234; *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 November 1991; Maura Cronin, 'Limerick publishing' in James H. Murphy (ed.), *The Oxford history of the Irish book, volume IV: the Irish book in English, 1800-1891* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 84-85.

<sup>11</sup> Ursula Callaghan, 'Newspapers', pp. 84-89.

<sup>12</sup> Gibbons Merle, 'Provincial Newspapers' in *Westminster Review* 12 (January 1830), p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Hazlitt, 'The periodical press', *Edinburgh Review* 38 (May 1823), p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> Editors did not simply copy stories from other newspapers but extracted stories and reports from the press, abridged items which were useful and readable, sometimes drew conclusions through additional commentary and then presented them to the public; for a discussion of contemporary methods of news-gathering in France see Hugh Gough, *The newspaper press in the French revolution* (London, 1988), pp. 174-179.

nomenclature and author's signing off using only their initials obscures the identities in many cases.<sup>15</sup>

Current scholarship sees the historiography of madness and its treatment as involving a 'balance between competing perceptions over time.'<sup>16</sup> The first works on madness and its history were essentially Whiggish in approach, the works of Robins being particularly prominent. The trend continued until the middle of the twentieth century when, from the 1960s, these works were challenged by revisionists like Michel Foucault who focussed on a 'social control' interpretation. Foucault considered that an understanding of madness was distorted by being in the hands of professionals, since the large-scale institutions dealing with the mad during an era he labelled as the 'great confinement' aimed to control those who could not contribute to a modernising society.<sup>17</sup> For Foucault, madness was a cultural construction that could be unpicked when one investigated the dominant ideologies of any given era. Foucault influenced others like Andrew Scull who, however, focussed on the individual experience in the context of a modernising society rather than on the professionalization and cultural creation of madness. Scull brought historical sociology to bear on the study of madness, examining the evolution of legislation regarding the mad within the landscape of an industrialising society. He moved over time from a concentration on institutions to a focus on individuals – as evident in the change in his book title from *Museums of Madness* to *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*.<sup>18</sup> Within his most recent work he has reflected current research and discussed the fluctuating course of opinion on mental illness, the perseverance or resurgence of older ideas, and the friction arising from the coexistence of competing frameworks, coming to the

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<sup>15</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 12 November 1805. The importance of these local contributors was highlighted by Alexander MacDonnell in the first edition of his *Limerick Gazette and General Advertiser*. He had constructed letter-boxes in the windows of his offices on Rutland Street in Limerick to receive any literary contributions that his friends in the city might desire to put before the public.

<sup>16</sup> B. D. Kelly, Review of 'Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820–1900' edited by Catherine Cox' in *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, Volume 30, Issue 2, (June 2013), p. 159.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and civilisation, a history of insanity in the Age of Reason* (London, 1987), p. 61. *Folie at déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* was first published by Librairie Plon in 1961. The translation used within this thesis is based upon the abridged edition which was published in 1964 by Union Générale d'Éditions.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Scull, *Museums of Madness: the social organisation of insanity in nineteenth century England* (London, New York, 1979); *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: madness and society in Britain 1700-1900* (Yale, 1999)

conclusion that medical accounts of madness should not be the only accepted historical discourses on the topic.<sup>19</sup>

Post-revisionists, in their turn, have examined how madness was 'constructed' legally, medically, socially and culturally. Roy Porter's main focus was on the social history of madness and on the experience of individuals— using many 'survivor' accounts and works written by the 'mad-doctors' in his research. He again highlighted that individual difference (between classes, institutions and individual humans) must be taken into account in studying the experience of madness. Porter stressed that madness relapses and perseveres, in inestimable manifestations, but that the popular and professional understandings of madness can be conditioned by time and place. Some revisionist theories are rejected by Porter. Foucault's theory of the 'great confinement' –

i.e. confinement as the exercising of government power, not treatment – is dismissed as 'simplistic and over-generalised'. It is disproved by the example of England, where an Act of Parliament permitting the use of public funds for establishing and supporting asylums was not passed until 1808, when an asylum system was already well established and utilised.<sup>20</sup> Porter dismisses retrospective psychoanalysis, suggesting that modern attempts to pin contemporary psychiatric labels on the past are destined to flounder. He appears generally to prefer the writings of the mad themselves to the experts who treated, controlled and wrote about their patients, depending on the medical consensus of the time.<sup>21</sup> Into this post-revisionist school also fit Robins, Finnane and Malcolm who focus within the Irish context on legislative change and the social context and function of the asylum.<sup>22</sup> Their findings have been re-examined in the recent past by Melling and Forsythe and,

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Scull, *A very short introduction to madness* (Oxford, 2011), p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> Roy Porter, *Madness: a brief history* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 3-4, 93-94.

<sup>21</sup> Roy Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles: a history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Athlone, 1987) p. 12; *The Faber book of madness* (London, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Robins, *Fools and mad: a history of the Insane in Ireland* (Dublin, 1986); Mark Finnane, *Insanity and the insane in post-famine Ireland* (London, 1981); Elizabeth Malcolm, *Swift's Hospital: a history of St Patrick's Hospital, Dublin, 1745-1989* (Dublin, 1989); Joseph Reynolds, *Grangegorman: psychiatric care in Dublin since 1815* (Dublin, 1992).

in the Irish context, Prior, Cox and Walsh, all of whom take a broader approach, involving the exploration of issues like social class, locality, family and politics.<sup>23</sup>

The present study is difficult to fit exactly into any of these historiographical approaches, dealing as it does with a theme that unexplored in any depth up to now. Because it focuses on the attitude of the press to madness, the thesis takes an approach akin to that of Foucault, concentrating on the cultural representation and construction of the lunatic and institutions for the mad, exploring how the mad were portrayed in print according to cultural preoccupations and the main ways that power relations are established within society.<sup>24</sup> However, the study fits more closely with the work of Porter in *Bodies Politic*, dealing as it does with the representation of a tenet of medical history (madness) within popular and ephemeral source materials.<sup>25</sup> This thesis also draws on the approach of R. A. Heuston. In his examinations of

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Melling and Bill Forsythe (eds.), *Insanity, Institutions and Society 1800-1914* (London, 1999); Pauline Prior, *Madness and murder: gender, crime and mental disorder in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2008); (ed.) *Asylums, Mental health care and the Irish: Historical studies 1800-2010*, (Dublin/Portland, Oregon, 2012); Oonagh Walsh, *Insanity, power and politics in nineteenth-century Ireland: The Connaught District Lunatic Asylum* (Manchester, 2013); 'Gender and Insanity in Nineteenth Century Ireland' in Jonathan Andrews and Anne Digby (eds), *Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: perspectives on gender and class in the history of British and Irish psychiatry* (Amsterdam, 2004); Catherine Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester, 2012); Catherine Cox and Maria Luddy (Eds.), *Cultures of care in Irish medical history* (London, 2010); BD Kelly, 'Mental health law in Ireland, 1821-1902: dealing with the increase of insanity in Ireland' *Medico-Legal Journal* 76 (1) (2010) pp. 26-33; 'Dr. William Saunders Hallaran and psychiatric practice in nineteenth century Ireland' in the *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 177(1), (March 2008), pp. 79-84.

<sup>24</sup> This is Foucault's central idea. Throughout *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault insists that madness is not a natural, unchanging thing, but rather depends on the society in which it exists. Various cultural, intellectual and economic structures determine how madness is known and experienced within a given society. In this way, society constructs its experience of madness; 'the essential thing is that the enterprise did not proceed from observation to the construction of explanatory images; that on the contrary, the images assured the initial role of synthesis, that their organizing force made possible a structure of perception, in which at last the symptoms could attain their significant value and be organized as the visible presence of truth; Foucault, *Madness*, p. 135.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (Ithaca, 2002); The purpose of Roy Porter's *Bodies Politic* is to examine the medical beliefs, medical practices, and health care providers of the period through 'the public representations of them in a variety of media, verbal and visual'; p. 272. In his preface, Porter observes that, like most historians, he has spent his career working with the documentary evidence that is conventionally thought to be superior to the 'merely visual'; p. 9. Yet, the proliferation in the long eighteenth century of images of all types led him to ask how exploration of these images and the texts invariably accompanying them could enhance the information and interpretations suggested by printed materials. *Bodies Politic* answers this question. Porter considers the use of body and medical metaphors to characterize political issues and changes in representations of doctors and medicine occurring in the Victorian era. He has claimed that he is 'not really a medical historian or a social historian' and that he is simply 'an eighteenth century man'; Hugh Freeman, 'Obituaries: Roy Porter, Formerly Medical and Social Historian', *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 26 (2002), pp. 398-399.

madness and society in eighteenth-Century Scotland, the purpose of which is to examine how insanity was perceived in wider society, and how what happened outside the walls of the asylum could influence how the asylum was portrayed.<sup>26</sup>

The crisis caused by George III's recurring bouts of insanity from 1788 onwards led to major public discussion, in both society and the press, regarding madness, the 'mad-business' and those who 'traded' in it. This was the case in the Irish provincial and national press of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup> The monarch was a 'victim' of madness in more ways than one. Further to the intermittent yet serious breakdowns in his mental faculties, he was also attacked in person by a series of lunatics, while numerous mad individuals, some reputedly Irish, regularly attempted to gain entry to the various royal residences over the course of his reign.<sup>28</sup> Over the past two decades, a wide range of research has been carried out regarding the impact of George's madness on both the political scene in the two islands, and on evolving attitudes to insanity.<sup>29</sup> Once the King was restored to full health in early 1789 psychiatry and the 'mad-doctors', having been found to be of assistance in the treatment of a powerful personage, could no longer be ignored by

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<sup>26</sup> R.A. Heuston, *Madness and society in eighteenth century Scotland* (Oxford, 2011); "'Not simply boarding": care of the mentally incapacitated in Scotland during the long eighteenth century' in Peter Bartlett and David Wright, *Outside the walls of the asylum: the history of care in the community 1750-2000* (London, 1999) pp. 19-44. Heuston deals with the language used to describe instances of madness and concludes that the way mental incapacity was perceived was influenced by society and culture, and therefore the language used reflected their meanings.

<sup>27</sup> William Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy* (London, 1972).

<sup>28</sup> The mad assailants on George III's person that were discussed in detail in the newspapers were Margaret Nicholson, John Frith and James Hadfield.

<sup>29</sup> The King's symptoms recorded at the time have been claimed by modern diagnosticians as typical signs of porphyria, inherited or acquired disorders of certain enzymes that normally debilitated the nervous system often with severe abdominal pain, vomiting, neuropathy and mental disturbances. More recent studies argue that he suffered recurrent attacks of mania as part of his bipolar disorder. The King's attacks were unusual both in their severity and in the fact that they did not appear until he was fifty years old. See Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the mad-business* (London, 1969) who claimed on the basis of selective reading and interpretation of the medical and contemporary accounts of King George III's illnesses that he suffered from acute intermittent porphyria. They later changed the diagnosis to the milder and rarer condition of variegated porphyria. Roy Porter advised caution in the interpretation of their findings: 'it is clear that in order to understand the history of psychiatry written by practitioners, it is necessary first to examine their own psychiatric commitments'; Roy Porter, quoted in T. J. Peters and Allan Beveridge, 'The blindness, deafness and madness of King George III: psychiatric interactions' in *Royal College Physicians Edinburgh* (2010, 40) p. 81. Nevertheless, Macalpine and Hunter's view of George III's illness has been widely accepted by historians as being caused by porphyria. Recent studies have presented evidence contesting Macalpine and Hunter's claims, including Peters and Beveridge, 'The blindness, deafness and madness of King George III', pp 81-85.

the press in Britain. The mad-doctors and the treatments they used on the mad gained respectability in the newspapers and began to be acknowledged within British medical circles and represented in the British press as the leading experts in analysis, treatment and care of madness.<sup>30</sup> However, it appears that this development did not occur at the same pace in the Irish press. It was not until the establishment of the network of pauper asylums in the 1820s that medicine and madness started to become intertwined in public and press discussion.<sup>31</sup> This was the case in both metropolitan and provincial papers; even though these developments were initially reflected within the Dublin newspapers, there was little difference between the Dublin and provincial press attitude to madness generally (especially prior to the establishment of the asylum system).<sup>32</sup> However, there were some significant differences in the Dublin and Limerick approach to the King's insanity.

In Britain the crisis following on George III's bout of madness in 1788 generated some twelve hundred speeches in parliament and between eighty and ninety pamphlets for public consumption.<sup>33</sup> There is no doubt that as an item of sensational news, the king's illness also had an impact on the Limerick press. The *Limerick Chronicle* sourced reports of the King's illness from the London newspapers the *Times*, *Courier*, *Morning Register*, and the *Star* and noted on 16 November 1788 that 'nothing is talked of, nothing is inquired after, but for his majesty's health.'<sup>34</sup> The issue of the king's madness and the subsequent crisis over the throne continued to be front-page news in Limerick from November 1788 onwards, the proprietor, Watson, postponing the inclusion of submissions from correspondents and even from paying advertisers to

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<sup>30</sup> Porter, *Mind forg'd manacles*, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> This will become apparent in later chapters and the discussion on the medicalisation of madness.

<sup>32</sup> This is consistent with the establishment of the first large public asylum in Dublin in 1815 at the Richmond hospital.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce E. Gronbeck, 'Rhetorical invention in the regency crisis pamphlets', *Quarterly journal of speech* Volume 58:4, 1972, p. 418.

<sup>34</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 8, 16 November 1788, *Dublin Evening Post* 13 November 1788. Philip Withers alleged in his pamphlets, printed in London, that ladies 'tittered' about the affair, Phillip Withers, *History of the royal malady [of George III: with variety of entertaining anecdotes, to which are added strictures on the declaration of Horne Tooke, Esq. respecting "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales," commonly called (The Hon.) Mrs. Fitzherbert. With interesting remarks on a Regency* (London, 1789), p. 21.

present the debates to the public. This extensive coverage continued until long after the announcement of the king's recovery in February 1789.<sup>35</sup>

Some Dublin newspapers like the *Evening Post* were very critical of the king's continuing on the throne and were more ready to support the regency of his son, and even used the king's condition as a marketing opportunity. The *Post* reported after the initial reports on the ill-health of the King that this first attack was pronounced as 'gout in the stomach [and] that since that it is found he has the dropsy', presenting the proprietor-editor, John Magee, with the opportunity to advertise the patent medicines sold in his offices.<sup>36</sup> No such advertising appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle*, despite the fact that its proprietor, Watson, also sold various patent medicines from his offices.<sup>37</sup> There were other ways in which the Limerick press stood back from making judgements on or exploiting the king's illness: it never used the words 'lunacy' or 'madness' or 'insanity' in relation to the king, and as these labels carried an enduring stigma, few details of his treatments were reported.<sup>38</sup>

More importantly, the Limerick press response to the king's madness seems to have been less concerned with the nature of madness than with the politics of the day. Inglis' noted that local political oligarchies were unwilling to commit themselves strongly to either side.<sup>39</sup> This seems to have been the case in Limerick where the *Chronicle* stayed relatively neutral in relation to the crisis.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the

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<sup>35</sup> Gronbeck has noted that debates went on for up to five months after the George III's recovery, *Rhetorical invention*, p. 420; *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 November, 2 January 1789.

<sup>36</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 8, 20 November 1788. *Dublin Evening Mail*, 12 March 1789; English essayist Abraham Hayward labelled this method of advertising as 'the art of association', Abraham Hayward, 'The advertising system', in *Edinburgh Review* 77 (April 1843), p. 5. An advertisement attached to the report without a break in the print noted that 'John Magee has 100 bottles of 'Gobold's Vegetable Balsam', and informed the readers that this was a known to alleviate the symptoms of dropsy.

<sup>37</sup> Callaghan, 'Newspapers', pp. 235-236; Callaghan also discusses the previous editor John Ferrar's involvement in the sale of apothecary goods, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 11 November 1788. On this day the paper notes regarding the King's treatment that on 7 November, 'by the advice of his physicians he was capped three times'.

<sup>39</sup> Brian Inglis, *Freedom*, p.52.

<sup>40</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 6 January 1789; Phillip Withers, *History of the royal malady of George III...* (London, 1789); Phillip Withers, *Alfred; or, a narrative of the daring and illegal measures to suppress a pamphlet intituled, strictures on the declaration of Horne Tooke, Esq. respecting "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales," commonly called Mrs. Fitzherbert: with interesting remarks on a regency: proving, on principles of law and common sense that a certain illustrious personage is not eligible to the important trust* (London, 1789). The Limerick press did not, for example, reproduce from the *Dublin Evening Post* the controversial letter from 'Alfred' (probably the pamphleteer Philip Withers) regarding the constitutional crisis, and addressed 'To the People of Ireland. According to Withers 'neither

*Chronicle* joined in the rejoicings when the king recovered his health, reporting in detail on the inter-denominational attendance at the 'solemn thanksgiving' in the Catholic chapel on the city's Francis Street to celebrate the 'happy recovery of our most gracious Sovereign from his late indisposition'.<sup>41</sup> In a way, the coverage of the crisis caused by the health of the king sums up the approach of this thesis generally, which focuses particularly on how madness was 'presented' to the public by the contemporary press.

The influence of medical publications on public perceptions of madness is difficult to assess. In fact, aside from Hallaran's textbooks of 1810 and 1818, medical works produced in Ireland during the period 1772-1843 seldom covered any aspects of madness. Moreover, it was not until the 1820s that the various British, American or European publications dealing with madness became more widely available, although the works of Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke were *advertised* in the Dublin press between 1815 and 1817, contemporary with the opening of the Richmond asylum, legislative reform and the production of the second edition of Hallaran's textbook.<sup>42</sup> From 1810 on, Hallaran's *Enquiry into the Causes producing the Extraordinary addition to the Numbers of Insane* was being advertised in Cork and Dublin, and although it was not advertised in Limerick, we do know that Thomas Spring Rice, in pressing for reforms in the asylum system, cited many of Hallaran's ideas and was in contact with the Cork-based physician.<sup>43</sup>

The relative lack of provincial attention to the medical treatment of insanity was again apparent in Limerick as late as 1819 when the *Limerick General Advertiser* published a series of letters on the need for a 'School of Physic' in the city, an

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common nor statute law made any provisions' for the lunacy of a monarch when the heir apparent was of age and waiting in the wings for power. He warned the people not to let Parliament dethrone the King as this ruling body was representative and had therefore to act on behalf of the people: 'the giddy multitude has been cajoled into the idea that the minister is fighting their battles'.

<sup>41</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 May 1789.

<sup>42</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 12 May 1815, 11, 18 October 1817.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account of Hallaran's work and findings see the *Freeman's Journal*, 28 October 1818. Hallaran's work was reviewed in peer journals of the time, *The Journal of Foreign Medical Science and Literature*, Volume 9 (Philadelphia, 1819), p. 515; *The Medico-chirurgical Journal: Or, Quarterly Register of Medical and Surgical Science*, Volume 1 (London, 1819), p. 555; 1817 (430) *Report from the Select Committee on the Lunatic Poor in Ireland: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee and an appendix*, pp. 12-16. Hallaran dedicated the second edition of his book that appeared in 1818 following the 1817 legislative reforms to Thomas Spring-Rice.

exchange prompted by the contemporary *The Limerick General Advertiser* in 1819 reported on the need for a 'School of Physic' in the city.<sup>44</sup> The author noted that Limerick possessed 'resources of medical, as well as of academical [sic] instruction which yield not to any of those far famed institutions in other countries'. This correspondence was prompted by the author's reading of the anonymously authored pamphlet, *The comparative view of the Schools of Physic of Dublin and Edinburgh*.<sup>45</sup> While the programme envisaged for the Limerick school included the study of clinical medicine, anatomy, the 'Practice of Physic [and] Operative Chemistry', the treatment of insanity was noticeably absent from the list.<sup>46</sup>

It is difficult to decide whether Limerick society was aware of any changes in attitudes to insanity but if so, one would expect these changing opinions to be reflected in the pages of the local press. However, newspaper reluctance to discuss local instances of madness, was coupled with a concentration on the sales-generating sensational and deviant aspects of the affliction. This means the researcher finds in the press a constructed reality in which Limerick seemingly showed little awareness of the changing attitudes to insanity. On the other hand, there may well have been some changes in attitude if we go by the changing terminology used in the pages of the House of Industry registers.<sup>47</sup> When the House opened in 1774, the most commonly used terms were 'lunatick' [sic] and 'fool', whereas a decade later, these terms had been replaced by 'insane' and 'idiot'. Whether this change had any real significance is not clear, but it seems from the register that the transition began in the late 1770s, just following the Regency Crisis.<sup>48</sup> A change in attitude is also visible in the increasing frequency with which doctors testified in relation to cases of lunacy, though lay testimonies from relatives or friends were still the accepted proof of the onset of madness within an individual.

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<sup>44</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 5 May 1819. The letter was possibly from John Banim who wrote pieces for the newspaper under the pseudonym 'A Correspondent'.

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous, *A comparative view of the schools of physic of Dublin and Edinburgh* (Dublin, 1818).

<sup>46</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 5 May 1819.

<sup>47</sup> David Fleming and John Logan (eds.), *Pauper Limerick, the register of the Limerick house of Industry 1774-1793* (Dublin, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> These changes will be discussed more in Chapter two.

Parliamentary enquiries, the records of individual asylums, coroners' inquests and the proceedings of criminal and chancery courts dominate studies regarding the mad in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Ireland. Parliamentary discussions on the plight of the lunatic poor in Ireland and the Irish discussions on the Regency Crisis of 1788-89 the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers for the nineteenth century have proved essential to this study. The three volume *Proceedings of the Irish House of Lords 1777-1800*, meticulously edited by James Kelly, have proved extremely useful.<sup>49</sup>

This study also focuses on those medical publications and legislative debates and provisions that received the most coverage within newspapers of the period.<sup>50</sup> The sensational and macabre information divulged in the 1817 parliamentary report on the Irish lunatic poor meant that this was the most widely reported in the Dublin newspapers. It was, in fact, one of the few legislative measures or debates on the state of the insane in Ireland to receive coverage prior to the establishment of the system of district asylums in the 1820s and 1830s. But the discussion of these developments is quite uneven. For instance, while the Dublin press gave considerable attention to the 1810 legislation reclassifying Richmond Lunatic Asylum as a district asylum, the 1817 major investigation into provincial lunacy provisions received no coverage in the press of Limerick.<sup>51</sup> When legislation eventually passed through parliament in 1821 facilitating the purchase of land to construct the new large-scale

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<sup>49</sup> James Kelly, *Proceedings of the Irish House of Lords 1777-1800 volumes I-III* (Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> 1817 (430) *Report from the Select Committee on the Lunatic Poor in Ireland: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee and an appendix.*; 1805 (61) *A bill for the establishment of provincial asylums for lunatics and idiots in Ireland.*; Sir John Newport's evidence, 1803-04 (109) *Report from committee respecting the poor of Ireland*, p. 771; 1838 (1 & 2 Vict. c. 27) *The Criminal Lunatics (Ireland) Act*; 1845 (302) *Criminal lunatics (Ireland). A bill for the establishment of a central asylum for insane persons charged with offences in Ireland, and to amend the act relating to the prevention of offences by insane persons, and the acts respecting asylums for the insane poor in Ireland, and for appropriating the lunatic asylum in the city of Cork to the purposes of a district lunatic asylum*; 1842 (504) *Lunatic asylums (Ireland). A bill [as amended by the committee] for amending the law relating to private lunatic asylums in Ireland.*

<sup>51</sup> Reynolds, *Grangegorman*, pp. 20–1; Brian O'Shea and Jane Falvey, 'A history of the Richmond Asylum (St. Brendan's Hospital), Dublin' in Hugh Freeman and German E. Berrios (eds.), *150 Years of British Psychiatry. Volume II: the Aftermath* (London, 2002), p. 408; Elizabeth Malcolm, 'Ireland's crowded madhouses': the institutional confinement of the insane in nineteenth and twentieth century Ireland' in Roy Porter and David Wright (eds.), *The Confinement of the insane: international perspectives, 1800–1965* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 317.

asylums, the local press in Limerick only became concerned and commented when the new asylum's cost to the city became apparent.<sup>52</sup>

The writings of William Saunders Hallaran also inform this study. During the period 1772-1843 Hallaran ran a lunatic asylum in Cork, one of the more humane and widely publicised institutions of its day. Hallaran was easily the most prominent Irish psychiatrist of the nineteenth century. His notoriety was as much due to his place as the forefather of Irish psychiatric writing, and the two editions of his books are viewed by scholars as progressive examples for the time in Irish medical writing.<sup>53</sup> His 1810 textbook of psychiatry, and the second edition that appeared following the 1817 parliamentary investigations into lunacy, were the most commonly cited in all the newspapers examined for this study.

The private and confidential correspondence and memoir of Maryanne Nevill are a highly valuable source of historical material, for the sentiments that appear in this work can be presumed to be less constrained and more sincere than the public declarations that appear in the newspapers; but all private correspondence and memoir cannot be rated alike. Some writers have lied as freely in private letters as in public speeches; therefore the historian must get at the character of the individual who has written the letter and the influences surrounding them and these factors must count in any satisfactory estimate of his accuracy and truth. The newspaper must be subjected to similar tests.

The reliance of the present study on local newspapers as its main source does present some problems.<sup>54</sup> In the first place, the fact that issues were covered in the

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<sup>52</sup> The local taxpayers were expected to pay for the construction of this expensive institution over a period of ten years. 1820 (84) (Ireland.) *Report of the commissioners appointed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to inspect the House of Industry, and to report upon the management thereof, with a view to the introduction of such reforms and improvements, as would render it, not only less expensive, but more efficient for the purposes for which it was originally designed.*; 1821: *Extracts from the Inspector General's Report on the State of Prisons in Ireland: 1815-1820*; O'Malley, 'Governors, staff and lunatics' p. 67; Hill *Asylum* in Liam Irwin et al, *Limerick history and society* p. 289.

<sup>53</sup> B.D. Kelly, 'Dr William Saunders Hallaran and the psychiatric practice in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Irish Journal of Medical Science* vol. 177 (2008) pp 79-84; Roy Porter, *The Faber Book of Madness* (London, 1991), p. 318.

<sup>54</sup> One of the great strengths of Anne Digby's book, *Madness, Morality and Medicine: A Study of the York Retreat, 1796-1914* (Cambridge, 1985) is her sensitivity to the deficiencies of the sources she uses. She is alert to possible biases and to the ambiguities they can contain as they records of the institution were mainly produced by those who governed the institution. Joseph Baumgartner discussed the issues

press did not automatically mean that the public was informed on these issues or that public opinion and press representation of insanity were identical.<sup>55</sup> The first thing to consider when using a newspaper as a primary source is the broader context for the selected articles. One must be careful not to wrench the newspaper out of the context of its time. Where possible other sources are used in conjunction with the newspapers for contextual understanding. The researcher must first look at the newspaper itself. In addition to the overall agenda of the newspapers, historians need to consider the intended audience. They must also consider the authors' and editors' purpose and the choices they made about how to write and what to include in each newspaper article. The articles did more than inform the reader about current events. Articles were also metaphorical. They could be event summaries, editorials, and even advertisements. Author bias, when the author is known, must also be considered. For example, an author could have particular local political agenda when writing about a topic or institution with which he or she disagreed. Newspapers were businesses and tended to be conservative, reflecting the economic and political interests of their owners, the protestant middle classes. The political outlook of the owners of the Limerick newspaper was reflected within their publications.

The study is organised as follows: Chapter 1 considers how the local press 'othered' the mad and madness by excluding local instances of madness. Chapter 2 explores the representation in the press of local institutions established to cater for the insane, and focuses particularly on the links between the newspaper proprietorship and the administration of the House of Industry – something which affected the way in which the press reported not only this institution but also the later local district asylum and its role in dealing with the insane. Chapter 3 explores how certain deviant actions were portrayed as lunacy, how criminal lunacy was portrayed in the provincial press and how the public reacted to the lunacy defence especially in cases of murder. Chapter 4 uses cases studies to discuss the links

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surrounding 'Newspapers as historical sources' in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (September 1981), pp. 256-258.

<sup>55</sup> Janice A. Radway, 'Reading is not eating: mass-produced literature and the theoretical, methodological and political consequences of a metaphor', *Book Research Quarterly*, (1986), Vol. 2, No. 3, pp 7-29. Radway challenges the literary critics of the 1970s and early 1980s, who focus on the text instead of the reader; p. 12

between insanity and religion, investigating any bias that may have been present in a protestant-controlled press.

While the historical analysis of newspaper articles, as attempted in this study, presents many challenges, it is important to note that newspapers serve a valuable purpose in building our understanding of a particular time period in history.<sup>56</sup> The impulse of a historian of the press in justifying the use of newspapers as historical materials is to adopt an apologetic tone. It is somewhat curious that such should be the case, for newspapers satisfy so many requirements of historical evidence. They are contemporary, and, being written contemporary to an event they could not strengthen any cause without making their intent and underlying ideologies clear. Their object was the relation of daily events, and the newspaper itself, its news, editorial columns and its advertisements were a graphic picture and representation of a community and society.

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<sup>56</sup> There have been some invaluable studies by Irish historians using newspapers as primary source material, and hopefully these works will increase in number; Marie Louise Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism: the Irish provincial press, 1850-1892* (Dublin, 1998); Tom Garvin, *News from a new republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin, 2010).

## CHAPTER 1: The 'othering' of madness and the madness of the 'Other'.

In the various newspapers of Georgian and Regency Limerick the mad were 'othered' and madness was a trait of the 'other'. The lunatic was often relegated to the position of 'other'. The terminologies of madness were used to signify the inferiority of not only those believed to be mad, but also of different nationalities and classes.<sup>57</sup> As a result not only was the lunatic an 'other' but the affliction of madness was itself 'othered'.

Satirical and metaphorical references to madness, used in the press for entertainment and educational purposes, meant that representations of stereotypes regarding the inferiority of the mad and the abnormalities of madness were assimilated into middle class and literate culture. Madness, insanity and lunacy were protean terms, encompassing multiple meanings. Such terms could constitute an insult, refer to an extraordinary occurrence, or refer to a legal decision or clinical diagnosis. Labelling the actions or character of an individual or group as those of a lunatic was both stigmatising and allegorical, even where this was not the ultimate intention. Madness was a rhetorical term signifying deviance, animality, excessive actions and an inability to control one's own life. Accordingly, the terminologies surrounding madness, real or alleged, were used by the press to pass judgement on the deficiencies of the character of another individual group or nation.

The phenomenon of 'othering' and the idea of 'otherness' – creating a distance between, on the one hand, society generally and what it deems acceptable and, on the other, that which is deemed to be outside the norm – is central to analyses of how majority and minority identities are constructed and the ways in which social identities are constructed. Otherness refers to that which opposes and is perceived as inferior to the initial idea, individual or group being considered. The 'other' often

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<sup>57</sup> William Hazlitt wrote of periodical press in 1823 that 'one of their most common expedients is to stew their victims over and over again with the epithets of abuse and to trust to the habitual association between words and things for the effect of their application'. He stated that such was the power of words for the press. Words gave the press 'the power of prejudice – and the means of poisoning public opinion' of which the desired outcome was to 'gag the one, hoodwink the other'; William Hazlitt, 'The periodical press' in *Edinburgh Review*, No. 38, (May 1823), pp. 375-376.

denotes a person other than one's self, other than 'I'. As a result the 'other' was identified as different and the spelling was often capitalized. People construct themselves in relation to an 'other' as part of a process of reaction that is not automatically related to stigmatization or condemnation. 'Othering' is important in the production of national identities, where practices of admittance, segregation, acceptance and rejection of others can form and sustain boundaries and national characteristics. It is a means of distinguishing between home and away, the uncertain or certain. Consequently 'othering' often involves the demonization and dehumanization of groups, which can be used to justify attempts to civilize and exploit these inferior 'others'.

The 'spectacle of the other' has been a central concern of sociologists. Stuart Hall debates the concept within his examinations of modern media's creation and 'naturalization' of 'difference' among countries and races.<sup>58</sup> Zygmunt Bauman writes that the notion of otherness is central to the way in which societies establish identity categories. He argues that identities are set up as dichotomies:

Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend.<sup>59</sup>

These dichotomies are set up as being natural and so often times in everyday life they are taken for granted and presumed to be natural. But within the pages of the Limerick newspapers published in the Georgian and Regency periods the social identities presented are not natural – they represent an established social order – a hierarchy where certain groups are established as being superior to other groups. According to Michel Foucault, this 'othering' is strongly connected with power and

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<sup>58</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The spectacle of the other' in Stuart Hall (ed), *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* (London, 1997), pp. 225-226, 245.

<sup>59</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and ambivalence* (Oxford, 1991), p. 8.

knowledge.<sup>60</sup> de Nie has considered the concept in relation to representations of the Irish in the nineteenth century English press.<sup>61</sup> This chapter uses this concept to break down the ideologies and resources that the local press of Limerick used to maintain their social identities. It is therefore interested in the ways in which notions of otherness are managed in relation to madness. For example, it considers how the mad become stigmatised in the Limerick newspapers as outsiders, and how or if such ideas changed over time. This chapter attempts not simply to applaud or condemn the newspapers representations of mad 'other' as positive or negative, but to also understand how these representations underlined, reinforced or challenged unequal relations of class, race and gender in the provincial press of early nineteenth century Limerick.

In their treatment of madness and the mad, the Limerick press reflect what Haraway has labelled 'situated knowledge'; the idea that knowledge is always partial, since social, cultural, political and historical factors can constrain the process of its construction.<sup>62</sup> It is obvious in the pages of the early nineteenth century Limerick newspapers that, due to their close allegiances to the local elites, they were reluctant to discuss the mental capacities of prominent and influential local persons. Consequently, one of the major themes of provincial press representations of the 'otherness' of madness was distance. Distance could be measured in miles (away from

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<sup>60</sup> When we 'other' another group, we point out their perceived weaknesses to make ourselves look stronger or better. It implies a hierarchy, and it serves to keep power where it already lies. For Foucault the 'othering' of the mad was used as a justification of their incarceration; Foucault, *Madness*, p. 227.

<sup>61</sup> Michael De Nie presents the 'Eternal Paddy' as Britain's 'eternal "Other"'. The differences between the Irish and British were cemented by race, religion, and class. Paddy was, as de Nie reminds us, a Celt, a catholic and a peasant, and an 'Other' that was actually a subject within the boundaries of the United Kingdom. The Irish were used within representations and within a reverse mirror of Irishness, the negative became positive, and the positive traits of Britishness emerged from the British press' representations of their neighbours. With Irish poverty, squalor and violence available as a foil to British dedication to hard work and integrity the nature of the Irish stereotype underwent little serious change in the nineteenth century; Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy, Irish identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Wisconsin, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> Situated knowledge is knowledge specific to a particular situation. It is a term coined by Donna Haraway as one which 'offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that makes up all positions'; Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: the science question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in *Feminist Studies* Vol. 14, No. 3. (1988) pp. 575–599.; Clifford Geertz has described cultural knowledge thus, 'I take cultures to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning', Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (U.S.A., 1973), p. 5.

Limerick), years (before the time of writing) or along class lines (attributing madness to social groups other than those reading the newspaper).<sup>63</sup> Once the asylum became an established institution within provincial and national consciousness during the Victorian era the newspapers began to print more stories regarding local instances of madness and discuss the affliction within a local framework, examining the prevailing issues with categorisation and understanding.

Interestingly it seems to have been easier throughout the period under investigation for the national than for the local press to discuss stories of the mad and madness. If a story of madness dealt with a local individual or event, then detailed discussion was rare, since local sensibilities could be offended, while commentary was more frequent regarding the issues surrounding madness the further from the printer's office an incident occurred. Local public and private personalities were sensitive to criticism and the fear of prosecution or of long running and costly disputes convinced proprietors and printers that it was wiser to omit local high society's more embarrassing and intimate activities, including any incidences of alleged madness. Consequently high profile local cases of madness whether of a deviant nature or otherwise were absent from the pages of the Limerick press. The provincial newspapers, when referring to madness, tended to confine themselves to more trivial happenings, and the lives and the deeds of the less exalted and therefore less powerful and dangerous personalities, possibly because of the danger of charges of libel. The Irish press were subject to strict legislation during the period under discussion. Resultantly a paper had to be aware of the possibility of upsetting local personalities through the publication of a defamatory article.<sup>64</sup> Madness was such a discriminatory term<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See later discussion of the Francis Spaight court case in chapter three.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Foley, 'How journalism became a profession' in Kevin Rafter, *Irish Journalism before independence, more a disease than a profession*, (Manchester, 2011), p. 28; Robert Munter, *The history of the Irish newspaper 1685-1760*, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 190. In 1787 Andrew Watson and the *Chronicle* were involved in libel case in which he was vindicated; Callaghan, 'Newspapers', pp. 28, 123.

<sup>65</sup> As most scandals emanated from the courts newspapers could contain spicy copy concerning trials of the rich and famous. It is interesting that the many scandals in which the local grandee, Vere Hunt, was involved, were never given cover in the local press; 'Running in tandem with the constructed and ordered reality of the gentry, merchants and elites, one uncovers the unstructured reality of others; Ursula Callaghan 'Newspapers', p. 192; Callaghan argues that the reporting of news in the late eighteenth century Limerick press could be 'maipulated' so as to reinforce a point of view and to frame

Daniel Defoe had remarked upon the domestic items of the newspapers that

this article call'd Home News is a common Hunt, tho' upon a cold scent after casualties; the Miseries of Mankind are the chief Materials, such as death and marriage in the first class, the disasters of Families, such as Robberies and bankrupts, that's the second class; the Jail Deliveries, either to or from the Gallows, that's the third class.<sup>66</sup>

During the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century the domestic news which Irish printers, including those of Limerick, felt it safe to print did consist very largely of such items. Stories of madness and insanity tended to be aligned with Defoe's 'miseries of mankind'. Local issues concerning the members of the same social class and connections as the socially connected printers of Limerick city were largely ignored.<sup>67</sup> As Defoe had complained, 'we read more of our own affairs in the Dutch papers than in our own'<sup>68</sup>. Stephen Harper in his studies of the twentieth century media has emphasized that the mass media have a tendency to portray mental distress differently depending on the race, gender and social class of the sufferer, and that these portrayals reinforce class, race and gender oppressions:

There is... a clear link between violence and poverty...[P]eople suffering with mental distress often belong to a lower social class than those who do not; their higher rates of violent behaviour might therefore be explained in terms of their frustration or anger at their lack of social power... Understanding violence as a response to social coercion is

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the local newspaper in a specific way, *ibid*, p. 118; for a detailed discussion of the libel laws, the so-called 'taxes on knowledge' of the period see Brian Inglis, *Freedom*, pp. 225, 230, 245; Richard Robert Madden, *A history of Irish periodical literature: from the end of the 17th to the middle of the 19th century; its origin, progress, and results; with notices of remarkable persons connected with the press in Ireland during the past two centuries* (London, 1867), pp. 303, 343, 345-346, 428, 524; Kevin Rafter (ed.), *Irish journalism before independence: more a disease than a profession* (Manchester, 2011); Christopher Morash, *A history of the media in Ireland* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 60-61, 66-67.

<sup>66</sup> *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, 21 August 1725, cited in Geoffrey Allan Cranfield, *The development of the provincial newspaper 1700-1760* (Oxford, 1962), p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Callaghan, 'Newspapers', p. 119.

<sup>68</sup> *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal*, 21 August 1725, p. 71.

strategically useful, dislodging the stigmatizing notion of violence as an individual act of evil.<sup>69</sup>

The identification of madness with the lowly rather than the elite was also true of the Limerick press in the nineteenth century. Predominantly produced for and consumed by the middle classes the newspaper was generally at liberty to include news regarding lower class instances of madness.<sup>70</sup> There has been remarkably little attention paid in modern scholarship to the popular equation of madness with a low social position.<sup>71</sup> An example of this avoidance of the local and the exalted in reports on madness was clear in 1825 when in a report on the suicide in Limerick City of a vagrant, Judith Smith, both the *Limerick Chronicle* and *Limerick General Advertiser* could name the victim, comment on her insanity and print a morbid and detailed account of her suicide. In contrast to this report on an outsider of lowly status, was the local press' attitude to the equally sensational suicide one year previously of one Mr Barnes, a local 'gentleman of respectability'. This had gone completely unreported in the city's newspapers and the *Freeman's Journal* (which did report it) had to source an account of the incident not from a Limerick newspaper but from the *Clonmel Advertiser*, published forty miles distant in the neighbouring county of Tipperary.<sup>72</sup>

There has been little focus to date on the perceived link between madness, distance and foreign enemies. However, such a link does appear in the Irish newspaper press in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The treatment of foreign news and politics in the press was less constrained and printers generally enjoyed a freedom in their reporting of foreign affairs unknown in the domestic

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen Harper, *Madness, power and media* (London, 2009), p. 46.

<sup>70</sup> Jennifer Ridden, 'Irish reform between 1798 and the Great Famine' in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.) *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 271. The *Anglo Germanic Advertiser* was quoted in the *Limerick Evening Post* in 1835 as describing the Irish as 'a frank, communicative people, and are both kind and vindictive in the extreme. The higher classes are well educated, but those of the lower orders are very ignorant; their lodging, food, and clothing are miserable. Their food consists almost entirely of potatoes'; *Limerick Evening Post*, 14 December 1835.

<sup>71</sup> Studies have tended to focus on the very real links identified within medical circles, and on the different systems of asylum available to different social classes; Cox, *Negotiating*, pp. 22-23, 223; Alice Mauer "'Confinement of the Higher Orders"; the social role of private lunatic asylums in Ireland, c. 1820-60' in *Journal of the history of medicine and allied sciences* 67, no. 2 (April 2012), pp. 281-317.

<sup>72</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, *Limerick General Advertiser*, 24 March 1825; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 May 1824.

sphere.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, images of lunacy were used to express animosity towards or castigate a foreign enemy. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period encompassing the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the Irish press followed the precedent of the British newspapers by casting France as the most significant 'other'.<sup>74</sup> The deficiencies of the French revolutionary leaders and systems of justice were equated with lunacy. During the volatile wars of the first coalition in France in 1794 Andrew Watson's *Limerick Chronicle* contained a report on the treatment of a 'lunatic woman' at the hands of 'the arch-demagogue Robespierre and the tribe of his partizans'. Charged with attempting to assassinate Robespierre, she was convicted and 'of course conducted to the devouring guillotine'. In this case, the report was less a direct comment on madness than on the existing political situation. Personal and political madness were intermingled, while stressing that the woman's madness offered her no form of legal protection. This incident was used as a direct contrast to the more humane system in Britain and Ireland, a circumstance remarked upon by the *Limerick Chronicle*:

When the luckless Margaret Nicholson attempted the assassination of our most gracious Sovereign, the magnificent lenience of a benevolent Prince, and the mild principle of laws on the occasion, mark a strong and moral contrast to the modern system of French justice.<sup>75</sup>

This equation of lunacy with political tyranny – most particularly foreign political tyranny – and with its acceptance by society continued into the opening years of the nineteenth century. Similar uses of madness were also evident in reports on Napoleon, especially following his exile to St Helena when his power and influence

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<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly some newspapers were prepared to take the risk, and were outspoken to the point of unruliness. But the printers of these papers were risking their freedom in a quest for press freedom, but also more importantly high sales figures. The *Dublin Evening Mail* and the *Dublin Evening Post*, under the direction of John Magee and Joseph Timothy Haydn respectively, were papers that dived with this sword of Dionysus

<sup>74</sup> Callaghan, 'Newspapers', pp. 143, 138; Christopher Morash, *A history of the media in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 April 1792. This is a reference to the use of the guillotine during the revolutionary years in France. Margaret Nicholson was an Englishwoman who assaulted King George III in 1786. Her futile and somewhat half-hearted attempt on the King's life became famous. The King was reported as saying 'The poor creature is mad; do not hurt her, she has not hurt me'. By this time Watson was employing an editor though this seems to have made little difference in the paper's approach or content; Callaghan, 'Newspapers', pp. 119-120.

had waned. Repeating a story that appeared in the *London Globe*, the *General Advertiser* dismissed the strange delusion under which ... mankind so long laboured, strangely imagining the man had possessed stupendous talents'. All Napoleon's achievements were deemed to have been 'done by an everyday blockhead...a man of such ordinary powers he can no longer be formidable'.<sup>76</sup>

The British newspapers were prone to passing the baton of scorned inferiority from the French to the Irish, and as the *Freeman's Journal* put it in 1814, a 'fashionable antipathy' existed toward Ireland in the English press.<sup>77</sup> As Curtis found in relation the later nineteenth century, Irishness and madness were frequently associated with each other – a prelude to the work of de Nie and Williams.<sup>78</sup> The Irish were often depicted in the English newspapers as violent and mad. The London newspapers regularly alerted the public to the violence and mental instabilities of what they termed the Irish nation, particularly its rural population.<sup>79</sup> While madness and savagery were familiar themes in British press descriptions of Parisian rebellious crowds in the 1790s, they also characterised newspaper depictions of the Irish rebellion, which recounted numerous tales of massacres, rapes, burnings and wanton destruction.<sup>80</sup> Even sympathetic papers such as the *Morning Chronicle* could bemoan the fact that the 'minds of the insurgents were so diseased and infatuated' while London's conservative press were even stronger in their condemnations of the Irish.<sup>81</sup> Attacks on the Irish character and its levels of sanity must be understood in the context of the fears of both elite and state regarding the potential for civil disorder in Ireland generally and in Limerick particularly. The county had been tormented by

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<sup>76</sup> *General Advertiser*, 1 November 1816.

<sup>77</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 20 August 1814.

<sup>78</sup> Lewis Perry Curtis, *Apes and angels: the Irishman in Victorian caricature* (Newton Abbot, 1971); Michael de Nie 'Britannia's sick sister: Irish identity and the British press 1798-1882' in Neil McCaw *Writing Irishness in nineteenth-century British culture* (London, 2004), pp. 173-192; *The eternal paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Wisconsin, 2004); Leslie Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, the British press, and the Irish Famine: killing remarks* (London, 2003), pp. 1-25. Interestingly the stereotypes surrounding the Irish emigrants within Britain have begun to receive detailed study through the Wellcome Trust funded project entitled 'Madness, migration and the Irish in Lancashire c.1850-1921'.

<sup>79</sup> de Nie, *The eternal paddy*, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Williams, *Killing remarks*, pp 42-45; de Nie, *Eternal paddy*, pp. 59, 63, 79.

<sup>81</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 6 June 1798, quoted in de Nie, p. 63. Such a preoccupation with Irish violence partly explains why the peaceful political movement of the 1820s and 1830s under Daniel O'Connell caused such surprise in the British press.

consistent agrarian and sporadic political violence from the latter years of the 1790s onwards.<sup>82</sup> MacDonnell's *Limerick General Advertiser* hit back after negative reports on the violence and mental capabilities of the Irish – all the reports described by the *Advertiser* as 'wilful libels' – that had appeared in the English newspapers in 1805 and again in 1806:

'The principal murders and depredations, which are stated to have been committed in Ireland for some time past, have been manufactured by the Editors of the English newspapers to fill up a vacancy in their prints. Upon these occasions, Limerick and its neighbourhood are generally selected for the scene of blood and outrage. The arrival of the mail often astonishes some of the [living] inhabitants with an account of their throats having been cut, their cattle houghed, and their houses burnt. This selection is an unfortunate one as Limerick since the year 1798 has been particularly free from any spirit hostile to the repose of society'.<sup>83</sup>

Though MacDonnell's defence concentrated on the factual alone, images of madness and sanity were frequently used in the contemporary British press both to explain and deny the alleged inherent rebelliousness and disorder in Irish society. Images of madness and savagery, drawn from views of the French republicans and applied in the late 1790s to the United Irish rebels rather than to the population in general, continued for over four decades to influence British press reporting on the Irish and Irish affairs.<sup>84</sup> Similar images continued to appear in Irish-printed loyalist pamphlets recalling the rebellion, and in both the anti-O'Connellite press in the 1820s, at the height of the Catholic Association's influence.<sup>85</sup> This tendency to equate violence and madness as an Irish characteristic was still evident in the late 1840s and continued to be rebutted by at least some Irish newspapers.

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<sup>82</sup> James S. Donnelly Jr., *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-1824*, (Wisconsin, 2009) p. 12; Pat Feeley, 'Whiteboys and Ribbonmen' in *Old Limerick Journal*, Vol. 2, (September, 1980) p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 14 September 1806; *Limerick Evening Post*, 23 May 1812.

<sup>84</sup> de Nie, *Eternal paddy*, p. 79.

<sup>85</sup> *Times*, 20 July 1824; *Times*, 20 July 1824. This was particularly so in relation to the murder of a child by a Catholic priest in Wexford in 1824, discussed in detail in Chapter 3 below.

Roy Porter, in looking at eighteenth and nineteenth century England, discussed how medical imagery could contain political meanings.<sup>86</sup> Similar uses of medical imagery, and especially images of advances in treatment of the mad, were used in political commentaries in the Irish provincial press. Writing in the aftermath of the famine and the failed Irish Confederate rebellion in 1848, a contributor to the *Nenagh Guardian*, using the pseudonym Somerville, claimed that if Ireland were likened to a human body then the English would claim that the country was 'in a state of temporary insanity for which the strait-jacket is indispensable'. Somerville maintained that he would not believe all that 'the neighbours say of poor Ireland' and 'to soothe, to reason with, is better'. Here Somerville alluded to the contemporary changes in the care of the mad, from restraint to moral methods of treatment.<sup>87</sup> The same analogy between political upheaval and lunacy was, as de Nie has suggested, used in the British press in its attacks on the Irish newspaper industry, which was presented as being run by a number of furious lunatics and unprincipled demagogues, who had sought to poison the public mind' in Ireland. During the famine English newspapers such as the *Derby Mercury* and the *Illustrated London News* claimed that in Ireland the catholic portion of the inhabitants set all laws at defiance and the *Observer* claimed that suspending the laws during this crisis 'merely enables them [the government] to restrain the patient during his temporary insanity and to prevent his from communicating the contagion of his madness in the inflammatory period of feverish excitement'.<sup>88</sup>

Somerville's comments are, however, significant in another way. They reflect changing attitudes towards the treatment of insanity, reflecting both the older methods of physical restraint (still used in serious cases of dangerous and violent insanity) and the contemporary methods of moral treatment, by now widely promoted in medical books and journals. Thus, the growing move towards 'moral'

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<sup>86</sup> Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic*; though focusing on political caricature and visual representations, areas in which eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British artists excelled, Porter identifies the consistent use of medical metaphors. *Bodies Politic* covers these sources in detail. Certain conventions were quickly grasped and repeated with the visual representations—bleeding for taxation, dissection for political ruthlessness, insanity and madness for political foes. In all these prints no one under the physician's care ever improves.

<sup>87</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 12 August 1848.

<sup>88</sup> Di Nie, *Eternal Paddy*, p. 139.

treatment of the insane and away from the older methods of restraint and seems to have been familiar to commentators in, and readers of, the Irish provincial press.

The 'distancing' of madness has been discussed by Foucault – instead of being a part of life, madness was set at a distance, 'under the eyes of a reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance'<sup>89</sup>. However Foucault's use of distance is as an ideological paradigm and the concept of distance as discussed in the present study is an aspect that has not been given much attention to date.<sup>90</sup> This study concentrates on cultural formulations and re-formulations of madness rather than Foucault's concentration on the social, legal and medical 'constructions' of the condition. It is clear from the cultural representation of madness in the provincial press that 'distance' in the context of madness could be gauged in terms of both miles and years, and accounts of such distant madness could be used by the press for both entertainment and moral instruction. The avoidance of scandal, not the urge for salvation or a fear of the ungodly, governed the Limerick newspapers' interactions with the mad.<sup>91</sup>

Using such a combination of distance in miles and years, in 1833 Haydn's *Limerick Evening Post* recalled the actions of a quick thinking youngster who, during the rebellion of 1745 in Scotland, feigned idiocy to save his rebel father.<sup>92</sup> A positive portrayal of mental deficiency, the story used the feigning of mental incapacity for entertainment and the reader was kept aware of the boy's ability to restore his own

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<sup>89</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness*, p. 70.

<sup>90</sup> The concept of 'social distance' is discussed by Melling and Turner and cited by Cox. Melling and Turner demonstrated that social distance is 'historically constructed' and that newspaper coverage of Victorian trials and commissions had an influence on the asylum becoming established within a social distance' in localities; Melling and Turner, 'the road to the asylum' cited in Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 107. This concept will be alluded to again in the conclusion of this thesis.

<sup>91</sup> Alluded to by Cox; *Negotiating*, p. 122. Callaghan notes of Andrew Watson that he was very conscious of his audience and was constrained 'within the parameters of patronage and deference'; Callaghan, 'Newspapers', p. 119. His son Henry would work under the same restrictions due to his father and his own close allegiances with the local corporation and powerful local merchant families.

<sup>92</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 9 January 1833. 'His father, Stewart, having gone over to the rebel side from his position in the army was hiding out in a cave. One day while his son was on this regular trip to deliver provisions he 'was overtaken by the military within a few yards of the spot where Stewart generally met him. One of the articles he carried was a pitcher of milk. With ready presence of mind he feigned idiocy and offered to give the milk to the drummer if he would let him know the use of that odd looking round thing that he had strapped at his back. The boy's broken English and strange gestures attracted the notice of an officer who, after a short conversation ordered the drummer to beat. This was all young Stewart desired; his father now had warning to keep close in his asylum.'

reasoning and understanding, thus linking the imagery of sanity and an individual's worth in society. In this incident, the father's political alignment (though diametrically opposed to that of the newspaper) did not need to be discussed, precisely because of distance in time, i.e. it had happened so far in the past, and instead the concentration was on the son's devotion and cunning and on the entertainment value of the story.

Fiction, art and ideas on mental condition appeared again in another story published in 1815 in both the *Limerick Chronicle* and the *Limerick General Advertiser*. This centred on the tragic and romantic tale of 'Louisa, the maid of the hay market'. The story, particularly relevant as a reproduction of a painting of Louisa was currently on exhibit in Limerick, centred on an insane but beautiful girl who, depending on the version of the story chosen, was associated with either Bristol or Austria and with either the mid-eighteenth or the early nineteenth century – again, safely separated in time from the time of publication. The story (like the painting) was designed to show how, despite an individual's undoubted madness, real virtue and refinement could shine through.<sup>93</sup> A further story appearing in the Limerick press, contemporary but distant in that it was played out in France, presented madness as a shield against the stresses of reality – and especially of the reality associated with political upheaval in France.<sup>94</sup> Lifted from the *Times* (London) and *Freeman's Journal* in 1820 and alleged to have first appeared in 'a French paper', it was entitled 'A Fortunate Maniac' and began with an evaluation of the aftermath of the French Revolutionary years when as a result of the 'confusion, horrors, crimes, and devastations, which have tormented and ruined so many millions of citizens...that our [French] mad-houses are inhabited by unfortunate beings, whose bewildered imagination causes them to suppose themselves a Marat, or a Louis XVI, a Marie-Antoinette, or a Charlotte Corday, a Malherbe, or a Robespierre, a Princess Elizabeth, or a Madame Rolland &c.' As well as reflecting the transnational nature of sensation and showing that readers were aware of the main players in revolutionary France it told the story of the Countess of C----- - who, despite the loss of her entire family during the Terror, lived in a state of serene

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<sup>93</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 4 April 1815. *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 April 1815. The portrait painted by W. Palmer, and engraved by P. W Tomkins was released as a print in 1788. The print depicts an unfortunate, mentally deranged girl of beauty and refinement who was found under a haystack at Flax Bourton, near Bristol.

<sup>94</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 20 September 1820.

expectation of the return of her family and the restoration to the throne of Louis XVI, while believing that 'Bonaparte [was] an imaginary being talked of only to plague her'.<sup>95</sup>

The French were not held up solely as displaying insanity. The awareness of the transition towards a moral treatment of insanity is also evident in the press commentary on French affairs. After the legislative measures surrounding madness had established the new system of lunatic asylums in the 1820s, and in contrast to the press construction of the folly of those in power in France, French psychiatrists and methods of care were, in fact, held in relatively high regard. The *Waterford Mirror* and the recently established *Limerick Star and Evening Post* both carried a report on a 'Ball in a Madhouse' that had occurred in a lunatic asylum in France.<sup>96</sup> The report in the *Limerick Star* included an introductory statement that 'the French certainly carry their treatment of the insane to a far higher pitch of refinement than we do... [It] may startle some of our mad-doctors; but what think they of the following precedent?' There followed a detailed description of the events at the Salpetriere asylum, under the guidance of M. Parinet, and it was stressed that the ball apparently 'served admirably to fix and amuse the minds of the patients; and several who laboured under melancholia were much diverted, for the time from their imaginary woes' – an approach considered to be far in advance of that in Britain and Ireland.<sup>97</sup> Though both publications carrying this report did so for purely entertainment purposes, the fact that they separately sourced the story from the *Medical Gazette*, suggests that provincial Irish newspapers were at least aware of up-to-date medical writings and were being informed, no matter how superficially, by changes in medical opinion regarding insanity.

The provincial papers' use of *Medical Gazette* extracts in 1835 also reflected an important reality of the period: the immense increase in the availability of medical

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<sup>95</sup> Of course, aligned with her desirable, but satirically laden maniacal state was the threat of violence, an ever present characteristic of the mentally ill (see murder and suicide). After discussing her generous philanthropic acts, and her kind treatment of servants and visitors, the story continues to inform the reader that 'she flies into a violent rage if any body [sic] is absurd or cruel enough to attempt to undeceive her, or if, in addressing her, they neglect her title'.

<sup>96</sup> *Waterford Mirror*, 21 January 1835; *Limerick Star and Evening Post*, 12 February 1835.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

writings about lunacy and insanity in Ireland that had occurred since the publication of Hallaran's works in 1810 and 1818. This in turn had led to changes in the use of the terms, a multiplicity of which existed, relating to madness. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755 had listed four definitions of madness, while by the end of the century there were obvious changes in the terminology of madness in the court cases heard at the Old Bailey and, in an Irish context, in the registers of the Limerick House of Industry.<sup>98</sup> Over the course of the following half-century there evolved an increasingly analytical attitude towards the definition of 'madness' and the terms used to describe it. By 1850, John Connolly, the English physician specialist on insanity who was closely associated with its 'moral treatment' and had given evidence to the 1843 parliamentary committee on Irish lunatics, published *Familiar views of lunacy and lunatic life*.<sup>99</sup> The book was significant in that it brought new thinking about madness outside the medical sphere and into the broader public domain since it was, as Connolly wrote on the first page of the first chapter, aimed at 'the general readers...those who have no ready access to the works of the professional writers'. His was the first stated and concerted effort to make medical and psychiatric views of and terms regarding insanity understandable to the public. Connolly recalled John Haslam's remarks that the word 'mad' was a complex term 'employed to denote all forms of mental disease'.<sup>100</sup> Following on from this Connolly opened his account of popular views of lunacy by stating that the English language was 'enriched with a number of other terms [for lunacy], many of which, though very expressive in themselves, have only, like mad or madness, a general signification'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Samuel Johnson had published the first great English dictionary, his *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755. Under 'Madness' Johnson listed four definitions, with twelve literary examples to support them: Disordered in the mind; broken in the understanding; distracted; delirious without fever; Expressing disorder of mind; Over-run with any violent or unreasonable desire; Enraged, furious. For a discussion of terms used within the Old Bailey see Joel Peter Eigen, *Unconscious crime: mental absence and criminal responsibility in Victorian London* (Maryland, 2003), p. 8, 154-155; for the Limerick house of Industry see David Fleming and John Logan, *Pauper Limerick: The register of the Limerick House of Industry 1774-1793* (Dublin, 2011), discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>99</sup> John Conolly, *Familiar Views of Lunacy and Lunatic Life: With Hints on the Personal Care and Management of Those Who Are Afflicted* (London, 1850). John Conolly (1794-1866) was the resident apothecary to Bethlem Hospital from 1795 to 1816. He introduced more humane treatment for lunatics during his time as resident physician at the Asylum in Hanwell in the 1830s.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1. Haslam was the former resident apothecary to Bethlem Hospital, serving in the post from 1795-1816.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid*, pp. 1-2.

By the time Connolly published on the familiar views of lunacy, this questioning of the terminologies surrounding madness had entered the public sphere and the pages of the Irish provincial press. This was in marked contrast to earlier press and public attitudes when, prior to and immediately following the establishment of the pauper asylums, the pauper mad in the House of Industry were described and labelled variously as ‘miserable’ lunatics, ‘desperate’ maniacs, ‘unoffending’ idiots and ‘vicious’ fools.<sup>102</sup> In this view, excess and deviance were always aligned with the mad and the terms used to describe them. By 1850, when Connolly’s book was published, insanity was being described in the provincial press as ‘misunderstood’ and newspaper commentators were calling for the extension of a more enlightened approach: ‘Although the ridiculous ideas prevalent half a century ago are mostly exploded some hardly less rational are still entertained by many persons of character and standing in the community’.<sup>103</sup> The press by now also called for a more exact description and definition of the mad and madness, pointing out the problematic nature of existing terminologies:

It is very doubtful if advantage has been derived from calling insanity by any other than its proper name.... it has been too much the custom to say without qualification that ‘insanity is the greatest affliction that can befall humanity’, and many patients have had their wretchedness vastly increased by this common assertion’... [Insanity] needs correct public opinion and a proper appreciation by the community of the true nature of their malady.<sup>104</sup>

In a recent work, Andrew Scull noted that in the twenty-first century the word madness ‘has now become linguistically taboo’, not just as a medical term but a ‘common-sense category’, although he categorically states that madness is ‘emphatically not something created by social label...[nor] is it simply a social

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<sup>102</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 16 December 1813.

<sup>103</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 24 August 1850. An interesting debate on the ‘usage’ of the term ‘irrational’ was played out in letters between Nigel Walker and Herbert Fingarette in the *Modern Law Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (January 1975), pp. 119-120.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

construct'.<sup>105</sup> The early nineteenth century press was aware of changing terminology in all spheres, the *Limerick General Advertiser* in September 1804 noting the 'daily alterations' occurring in the colloquial use of the English language.<sup>106</sup> By 1845 the provincial press had begun to note the terms used for mental illness: it was 'called Lunacy, Insanity or Madness depending upon the ridiculousness, perversity and collusions of temper'.<sup>107</sup> Madness was the most defaming and offending of the terms, signifying stupidity, animality and complete derangement when used in medical or legal discussions, yet paradoxically was also the loosest of the terms and the one most popularly used in the press and print to signify that an event or action was outside the social norm. The term 'lunatic' became the accepted legal categorisation of an individual deemed to be mentally ill.<sup>108</sup> Within the press it thus became more frequently within discussions of mental health and ill-health. These changes in language were contemporary with changes in the function of, and classificatory system used within the local House of Industry as will be evident in the next chapter. The availability of a large-scale District Pauper Lunatic Asylum located on Mulgrave Street from the 1820s onwards and the influence this institution would have on representations of the mad in the newspapers of Limerick city will also be discussed.

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<sup>105</sup> Andrew Scull, *Madness*, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> A satirical story labelled 'Bow-Street' was printed in the *General Advertiser* in September 1804. It concerned the 'true' story of a disturbance by 'a naval hero' written about in a sardonic manner, using naval phrases in a farcical style reminiscent of the farces produced at the Covent Garden Theatre. This theatre was where the 'hero' had been arrested and brought by two of the Bow Street Runners to answer for his actions before the magistrates. He was charged with violently assaulting a youth of fourteen. According to the report the man had been drinking heavily, and 'his *upper works* were a good deal deranged'. The unnamed commander's mental foibles at the expense of alcohol remain unquestioned; though transgressions of this kind are a prevalent target in provincial press reports on 'spirituous liquors' among the lower ranks. The commander is granted the protection of anonymity and his behaviour laughed off due to his high rank in the navy. *Limerick General Advertiser*, 19 September 1804.

<sup>107</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 11 July 1845.

<sup>108</sup> Finnane noticed in his pioneering work that the epithet 'the insane' does not sufficiently characterise the quality of the interaction of these people with sane society; Finnane, *Insanity*, p. 169.

## CHAPTER 2: Reporting on the institutions of madness

Up to the 1770s, madness was an impairment that was mainly treated within the private sphere, whether that was at home or, if an individual were wealthy, in a private – usually English or continental – asylum. During the early eighteenth century, the numbers of such private asylums increased in Ireland. At the turn of the century, even among those with financial resources, there were few private madhouses outside of Dublin and Cork.<sup>1</sup> Six such fee-paying institutions for the mad were available with Ireland in 1825, expanding to twenty by 1865.<sup>2</sup> Due to the scarcity of any specialised forms of confinement in eighteenth-century Ireland, the confinement of lunatics in various ways by their families, usually within the household, continued at least until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> De Latocnaye, visiting Ireland in the late 1790s, recounted the case of the County Limerick farmer who kept his demented wife in the vault of a ruined castle close by his house. He secured her with a chain to a heavy harrow to keep her secure. She succeeded in escaping and climbed up some ninety feet to the top of the ruin, where she remained, eluding capture, ‘to the astonishment and terror of the spectators’.<sup>4</sup>

By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, however, a more institutionalised provision for the insane (whether pauper or prosperous) was becoming available. This chapter focusses on the two local institutions dealing with the pauper mad in Limerick city: the House of Industry from its establishment in 1772 to its closure in 1843, and the Limerick District Pauper Lunatic Asylum from its opening in 1827 to 1843. The chapter explores the mental health provisions in these institutions, with a

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Mauger “‘Confinement of the Higher Orders’”, p. 287; these included the Bushy Park Retreat in Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, advertised as ‘limited to the more respectable classes of society’ and owned and managed by John Peppard, M.D. This asylum, it was claimed, was ‘so far distant from the City of Limerick as to preclude the possibility of the painful visits which curiosity frequently induces and which similar institutions are often subject to...it does not, in any respect, resemble a place of restraint, and has ever been proverbial for the salubrity of its situation, Henry Croly (ed.), *The medical directory for Ireland* (London, 1843), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Finnane, *Insanity*, p. 23. In fact despite the spread of institutional care for people with mental illness in England from 1650 to 1850 families remained the main source of support during this period for the poor and pauper lunatic, Akihito Suzuki, *Madness at Home, the psychiatrist, the patient, and the family in England, 1820-1860* (London, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> John Stevenson, *A Frenchman's walk through Ireland, 1796-7: translated from the French of de Latocnaye* (Belfast, 1984), p. 63.

specific emphasis on press representations and contemporary attitudes – reflected within the pages of the local newspapers – to both the institutions themselves and the institutional treatment of the insane.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence of the running of the Limerick House of Industry and of local attitudes to the institution is relatively limited, but valuable insights are available in the local and national newspapers of the day, and in the only surviving register of the House, covering almost the first twenty years of its operation.<sup>6</sup> Travellers' accounts of their visits to Limerick and its institutions provide some outsider contemporary comment, while Irish medical writings together with parliamentary bills, accounts of debates, and commissioners' reports allow the Limerick institutions for the mad to be examined in the broader context. Together, these sources suggest that although lunacy was not initially seen as a separate category of affliction to be supported within the House of Industry, the institution did provide assistance and confinement for the insane and actually fulfilled the role of a public lunatic asylum long before the establishment of the Limerick Pauper Lunatic Asylum in 1827.<sup>7</sup>

The changing purpose of Limerick House of Industry from an institution to house vagrants and paupers to one with the functions of a lunatic asylum seems to be part of a more general trend in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Digby has noted in the English context that institutions were not static, and that their functions could change considerably over the course of the early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In the Limerick context these changes were reflected in the successive titles by which the House was

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<sup>5</sup> These two institutions were the most widely discussed local provisions for the insane, with little or no reference being made in the press to private institutions.

<sup>6</sup> This register, covering the years 1774 to 1793, was made available to the public late 2011 through the work of David Fleming and John Logan. David Fleming and John Logan (eds.) *Pauper Limerick*, (Dublin, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> In 1772 a new act of parliament sought to improve the relief of the poor in Ireland. This act was instigated following a campaign conducted by Dr Richard Woodward, Dean of Clogher, seeking measures to relieve the public of the nuisance of proliferating beggars particularly in the cities and towns. Among its provisions was one for the establishment of a form of hospital/poorhouse to be known as Houses of Industry. The objectives of these establishments were:

1st, The support of such helpless Men as from age and infirmities were deemed worthy of admission, 2d, The support of such helpless Women as from age and infirmities were deemed worthy of Admission; 3d, For men who were committed as Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars; 4th, For Such idle, Strolling and disorderly Women as were committed; and 5th, for deserted and fatherless Children under the Age of Eight Years.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Digby, *Madness, morality and medicine: a study of the York Retreat 1796-1814* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 64.

known. What began as the 'House of Industry' in 1772 was still classified as such in 1791, but by 1793 the title had been expanded to the 'House of Industry and Hospital for Lunatics'.<sup>9</sup> Recognition of the Limerick House as an asylum for the mad was evident in the notes written by William Saunders Hallaran, Senior Physician to the Cork House of Industry and Lunatic Asylum, appearing in 1810 as an appendix to his Irish textbook on insanity. He discussed the Limerick Institution and its deserved recognition as an asylum for the mad in response to traveller John Carr's condemnation of the care provided for lunatics within the establishment in 1805.<sup>10</sup> This asylum-type function of the institution was even clearer in 1838 when, on the eve of its closure, it was referred to in the local newspaper as the 'Hospital for Incurable Lunatics'.<sup>11</sup>

An examination of the register of the House provides a more detailed picture of the growing number of insane in the institution over the first twenty years of its existence. The first recorded admission of an individual with a mental disorder (very vaguely described) was that in 1774 of a seventeen-year old 'fool', James Couney.<sup>12</sup> Fleming and Logan have estimated that between 1774 and 1793 those suffering from mental and behavioural disorders made up ten per cent of all inmates, and just over twenty-eight per cent of all those categorised as ill.<sup>13</sup> This is confirmed by a year-by-year analysis of the registers. While the overall number of inmates rose from eighty-eight in 1787 to 153 in 1793, there was also a considerable increase in the admissions of those deemed to be suffering from some form of mental and/or behavioural disorder.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the number of lunatics among the inmates rose from twelve in 1787 (11.5 per cent of all admissions) to twenty-seven in 1789 (twenty-six per cent of all admissions). During the first nine months of the year this proportion of lunatics within the population of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 February 1791, 26 May 1793.

<sup>10</sup> William Saunders Hallaran, *An enquiry into the causes producing the extraordinary addition to the number of insane: together with extended observations on the cure of insanity; with hints as to the better management of public asylums for insane persons* (Cork, 1810), Appendix, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 November 1838.

<sup>12</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper Limerick*, p. 2. Couney was admitted on 27 October 1774 and eloped less than two weeks later on 6 November 1774.

<sup>13</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper Limerick*, p. xxii.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, 14 Feb 1791 11 May 1793, 14 March 1792. By April 1787 Watson detailed the inmates for the year 1787 as follows: aged and infirm 41, poor, able to work, 35, lunatics 12, in all 88. By 1793 he claimed in the *Chronicle* that the institution had 'embraced the wretched of every domination', and as of March 1792 the numbers in the house were 'The number now in the House, are 153, viz 48 Men and Women employed, 77 Men and Women sick and infirm, 28 Men and Women Lunatics.'

House was as high as fifty per cent, with forty-five males and fifty-one females described by the local press as 'old, infirm, blind, and lunatick'.<sup>15</sup> The last surviving registry entries for the House in 1793 described twenty-seven individuals (twenty-one per cent of the whole population of the House) as lunatics.<sup>16</sup>

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>Total Admissions</b>	<b>Mental and Behavioural Disorders</b>	<b>% of total admissions</b>
1774	57	2	3.5 %
1775	118	9	8.0
1776	136	11	7.5
1777	131	12	9.1
1778	203	13	6.4
1779	163	3	1.9
1780	138	12	8.5
1781	246	10	4.7
1782	255	16	7.0
1783	119	12	10.0
1784	26	10	33.4
1785	76	12	16.5
1786	131	17	13.0
1787	77	9	11.5
1788	142	13	9.0
1789	105	27	26.2
1790	181	27	15.0
1791	174	15	8.6
1792	210	16	7.6
1793 (to 9 May)	54	8	19.0
<b>Total/Av</b>	<b>2742</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>10.25</b>

<sup>15</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 September 1789. During these months, provisions were so scarce as to warrant an earnest appeal for funds in the press. On 21 September 1789 the *Limerick Chronicle* published 'An Appeal to the Publick [sic]', showing how although designed to house three hundred inmates, the House in Limerick was serving as a 'humble retreat for ten thousand poor'. Seventeen out of thirty-four admissions in 1789 were lunatics.

<sup>16</sup> The category of classification used by Fleming and Logan as based on DSMIV. Logan and Fleming's statistical breakdowns of the recorded health issues surrounding admission are invaluable as a means of comparison to the whole.

Thus, whilst not defined as a distinct group in the legislation establishing the house in 1772, the 'lunaticks' [sic] came over the course of four decades to be a recognised group within the establishment.<sup>17</sup> This increase in lunatic admissions may be accounted for in several ways. It does not seem that prevailing economic conditions had any direct effect on the rate of lunatic admissions, although the lunatic poor could be considered among the most vulnerable in times of hardship. Poor weather and food shortages throughout the 1780s led to food shortages and a significant social crisis, and to a peak in general admissions (totalling 255) in 1782. Yet the sixteen lunatic admissions in that year accounted for only seven per cent of the total admissions. In contrast, in 1784 ten of the mere twenty-six people admitted to the House (33.4 per cent of the total) were described as insane.<sup>18</sup> On average, ten insane individuals (just under ten per cent of the yearly total) were admitted annually to the House of Industry over the first fifteen years of its existence. However, admission rates seem to have had little relationship to economic conditions, and when the real increase in admissions occurred (twenty-seven per year in 1789 and 1790, twenty-six and fifteen per cent of the respective totals) this had possibly more to do with legal changes in the role of the institution – i.e. that the 1787 legislation allowing Grand Juries to attach separate lunatic wards to Houses of Industry was availed of by the Guardians of the Limerick House.<sup>19</sup>

The growing number of lunatics in the House of Industry led to severe overcrowding, and to criticisms that reflected a growing belief in some quarters in the 'moral treatment' of the insane. Moral treatment was a therapeutic approach that emphasized character and spiritual development, and called for kindness to the patient.

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<sup>17</sup> Evident in press reports, paid-for advertisements and commentary, and even within travellers' accounts of their visits to the House. Inmates were normally divided into three or four categories; male/female, employed/unemployed (maybe unemployable), sick and infirm, and lunatic.

<sup>18</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper Limerick*, p. xiv. In times of severe crisis, the Limerick House of Industry attempted to feed and help as many of the needy and disabled as possible outside the gates of the institution. They admitted only those most in need of asylum, starving families, the blind, old, and the insane, 'for who else would shelter twenty lunatics who are now in the House?'; *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 November 1789. Only two years later, in 1791, notices of upcoming charity sermons on behalf of the House recalled the struggles of 1789 in their perpetually on-going appeals for funds, *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 October 1791. 1789 continued to be used as a reference point to remind the public of how bad situations could get; *Limerick Chronicle*, November 1 1793.

<sup>19</sup> The Inspector General of Prisons report in 1833 referred to the 'lunatic wards attached to the House of Industry', H.C. 1833 (67), *Prisons of Ireland. Eleventh report of Inspectors General of Prisons, Ireland: 1833*, p. 27; *Limerick Chronicle*, May 19 1788.

Moral treatment hypothesized that insanity was caused by damage caused to the soft and fragile brain by external conditions. Removing patients to an appropriate environment where they could indulge in clean, healthy living, and would be offered exercise, work, education and religious instruction, was thought to facilitate their cure. Within this new psychological approach, insanity was viewed as an affliction curable by psychological means so that with time, the correction of patients' 'insane ideation' would lead to a normalizing of their behaviour. The close observance of behaviour was required, and excessive restraint, now considered obsolete and barbaric, was avoided.<sup>20</sup> Nineteenth century mad-doctors and reformers were confident believers in the curative powers of moral treatment, and this was the core of the regime in the new District Lunatic Asylums established from 1817 onwards.<sup>21</sup>

These developments seem to have had little real impact on the care of lunatics in the Limerick House of Industry, but there were some practical improvements, described by the institution's supporters in the *Chronicle* 'progressive'.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the House had sixteen rooms upon opening in 1772, five years later a separate building had been completed with an infirmary and thirteen cells for lunatics.<sup>23</sup> This dedicated accommodation and consideration for lunatics in the House was highlighted in local newspaper appeals for public support for the institution:

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<sup>20</sup> Markus Reuber, 'Moral management and the 'Unseen Eye': public lunatic asylums in Ireland, 1800-1845' in Greta Jones and Elizabeth Malcolm, *Medicine, Disease and the State in Ireland 1650-1940* (Cork, 1999), p. 211; such an approach was being instituted at the Richmond Asylum in Dublin.

<sup>21</sup> William Man Burrows, *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (London, 1824), pp. 667-669; Samuel Tuke, *Description of the Retreat, an institution near York, for insane persons of the Society of friends* (York, 1813), pp. 131-136; Hallaran, whilst complimentary of 'moral treatment' noted that this system of treatment was not applicable to all types of patients, Hallaran, *Observations*, 1818, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Scull, *Social Order, Mental Disorder: Anglo-American psychiatry in historical perspective*, (Berkeley, 1989), p. 84; *Limerick Evening Post*, 18 June 1818. Possibly the recently published second edition of Williams Saunders Hallaran's textbook, himself a physician within a house of industry, may have influenced the timing of these reports.

<sup>23</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper Limerick*, p xiii. The first stone of the building was laid at a ceremony on 10 March 1774 by Mayor Joseph Johns and attended by the city's corporation. Building was completed 'sometime in late 1774 or early 1775' according to Fleming and Logan. According to John Ferrar's contemporary description printed by Andrew Watson in 1787 the house was , 'Light and handsome, forming a large square built in courses, ornamented in front with cut stone; contains 16 large rooms, with an Infirmary at the foot of the garden in the rear of the house, and a number of cells for lunatics'. John Ferrar, *The history of Limerick: ecclesiastical, civil and military: from the earliest records, to the year 1787: illustrated by fifteen engravings, to which are added the charter of Limerick, and an essay on Castle Connell Spa, on water in general and cold bathing* (Limerick, 1786), p. 365; 'the house of industry was founded on the north strand by Grand Jury presentments on the county and city, to which was added £200 by Dr Edward Smyth of Dublin, towards providing thirteen cells for the insane'.

The men sleep at one side of the house, the women at the other...the building is roomy and convenient, capable of containing 300 poor, the gardens produce vegetables for the house, at the bottom of the garden are sixteen warm cells and rooms for lunatics, who are carefully attended to and fed by their keepers.<sup>24</sup>

The pre-famine increase in the population of the city inevitably must have meant an increase in the demands for admission to the House of both non-lunatic and lunatic poor, the figures for the latter appearing higher than in the previous century.<sup>25</sup> By the 1820s and into the 1830s inmates classified as lunatics sometimes accounted for over twenty per cent of the total residents.<sup>26</sup> By 1827, the year the local district lunatic asylum was opened, the Limerick House of Industry accommodated a total of 450 inmates who, despite some additions to the yard, were now 'crowded to excess, and the yards for exercise encroached on to such a degree, as to contract them beyond what they should be in point of space'. Forty of these residents were lunatics, mostly 'idiots' and those suffering from epilepsy.<sup>27</sup> The number of lunatic inmates in the institution rose to a maximum of sixty-nine in 1836, falling again to forty-four just before the closure of the House in 1841.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 December 1788.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Potter and Patrick J. O'Connor have discussed the rapid growth in Limerick's population, theorising that 'between 1700 and 1841 the population of Limerick grew faster than that of any other Irish city except Belfast'. The population of the city increased from 32,000 in 1776 to 48,000 in 1841 augmented by about 16,000 living within the rural areas of the liberties; see Patrick J. O'Connor, *Exploring Limerick's past. An historical geography of urban development in county and city* (Newcastle West, 1987), p. 42; Matthew Potter, *The government and the people of Limerick. The history of the Limerick corporation/ City council 1197-2006* (Limerick, 2006), p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 May 1835. *Limerick Herald*, 11 April 1832. *Limerick Evening Post*, 3 June 1835. *Limerick General Advertiser*, 18 September 1820.

<sup>27</sup> Paddy Lysaght 'The House of Industry' *Old Limerick Journal* (September, 1980), vol. 4, p. 21; H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*; H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eighth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*; H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eighth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*; H.C. 1833 (67), *Prisons of Ireland. Eleventh report of Inspectors General of Prisons, Ireland: 1833*; H.C.1834 (63), *Prisons of Ireland. Twelfth report of Inspectors General of Prisons, Ireland: 1834*; H.C. 1835 (114), *Prisons of Ireland. Thirteenth report of Inspectors General of Prisons, Ireland: 1835*; H. C. 1836 (118), *Prisons of Ireland. Fourteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1836: with an appendix*; H. C. 1836 (523), *Prisons of Ireland. Appendix to the fourteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland; 1836*; H.C. 1837 (123), *Prisons of Ireland. Fifteenth report of the Inspectors General on the General State of the Prisons of Ireland, 1836: with appendixes*; H.C. 1837-38 (186), *Prisons of*

The problem of accommodating the incurable mentally ill was also evident in contemporary Dublin. There the new Richmond Asylum, which was intended to manage the lunacy problem island-wide, was unable to cope with the numbers of incurables that filled its rooms.<sup>29</sup> In Limerick, too, where the newly opened District Lunatic Asylum was intended to admit only those deemed to suffer from ‘curable mania’, the only place of refuge for the incurable was within the House of Industry.<sup>30</sup> This exclusion of incurable lunatics from the new Asylum led to negative coverage of that institution within the local press: the *Chronicle* reported that while ten men and four women had been admitted to the new asylum from the House of Industry, fifty-two ‘unhappy creatures’ still remained in the older institution.<sup>31</sup> In 1826, the Inspector General’s report noted that ‘a miserable class of paupers, who at present occupy the smaller lunatic institutions [House of Industry] are still to be provided for.’<sup>32</sup>

Long-term cases increased the stresses on that institution to such an extent that by the time of its closure it was seriously overcrowded with, as already outlined, almost one-fifth of its inmates defined as lunatics.<sup>33</sup> The District Asylum, too, though this was

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*Ireland. Sixteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1837: with appendixes; H.C. 1839 (91), Prisons of Ireland. Seventeenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1838: with appendixes; H.C. 1840 [240] Prisons of Ireland. Eighteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1839: with appendixes; H.C. 1841 Session 1 [299] Prisons of Ireland. Nineteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1840: with appendixes; H.C. 1842 [377] Prisons of Ireland. Twentieth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1841: with appendixes; H.C. 1843 [462] Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-first report of the inspectors-general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1842: with appendixes.*

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Malcolm ‘Ireland’s Crowded Madhouses: The Institutional confinement of the insane in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland’, in Wright and Porter *The Confinement of the Insane*, pp. 315-333.

<sup>30</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 January 1827. This advertisement was signed by and most likely paid for by the manager John Jackson. On the 27 January, the day of opening, an advertisement printed in the *Chronicle* claimed that ‘it is right to state that this institution is not authorised to receive idiots or epileptic patients... rules and regulations have been prescribed, according to Act of Parliament, by his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant and the Privy council of Ireland, which must be attended to, and all admissions are to be conformable thereto’; *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 January, 1827.

Finnane notes with regards to the district asylums that it was possible that ‘admissions could take place as much through the default of other institutions as through medical judgements’, Finnane, *Insanity*, p. 32. Undoubtedly this was also the case with regards to the House of Industry. Those whom other institutions (hospital, charities), did not want were liable to end up in the house or else prison.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, 31 January 1827.

<sup>32</sup> H.C 1826 (173), *Prisons of Ireland. Fourth report of the Inspector Generals on the general state of the prisons in Ireland: 1826*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> In 1828 the House of Industry was home to over five hundred inmates, the highest number that at any one time were receiving relief within the house. Inspector General’s Report, 1829 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the state of the prisons in Ireland: 1829*, pp. 29, 59.

not publicised in the local press, soon faced similar overcrowding problems, as reflected in the Inspector General's Reports by 1830.<sup>34</sup> Newspapers in other provincial centres in Munster commented on the problem of accommodating the insane, even in the new institutions: 'No sooner are these receptacles for wretchedness erected than they overflow with patients'; 'Many of these incurables came under my own view within a few years, from my connections with the Houses of Industry and lunatic asylums, which afford an asylum to several but cannot to a sufficient number. An asylum should be provided for these wretched beings'.<sup>35</sup>

In Limerick conditions in the House of Industry seem to have deteriorated in the thirty years after its establishment, so that it seems unlikely that the idea or practice of 'moral treatment' was carried out in any real sense. John Carr had commented in 1805:

Madmen, stark naked girded only with their irons, standing in the rain, in an open court', and in the venereal ward 'wretched female sufferers...imploring for a little more covering. Whilst several idiots squatted in corners, half-naked, half-famished, pale and hollowed-eyed...[and] bore a vacant stare upon the loathsome scene.

Ground floor cells were 'scantily supplied with straw, damp and ill-secured', while clothes were reduced to 'rags and vermin'. He described the institution as a whole as 'gloomy abode of mingled want, vice, disease, and malady'.<sup>36</sup>

Whether it was these reputedly appalling conditions or a change in the attitude to the treatment of lunacy, as reflected in Hallaran's works, calls for changes in the institutional approach to insanity were made from the closing years of the eighteenth century

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<sup>34</sup> H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eight report of the inspectors general on the state of the prisons in Ireland: 1830*, p. 59. John Jackson, manager of the Limerick lunatic asylum, wrote a letter to the inspectors General claiming that the asylum could already be 'now considered as little better than a hospital for incurables, being crowded by persons who can never derive any benefit from it beyond that of safe custody'; p. 43; The Inspector General called for the accommodation of incurables in store-houses of the newly purchased ground of the asylum in 1835 as 'should such an arrangement be made, it would exhibit a sense of national benevolence not to be found elsewhere in Europe', H.C. 1836 (118), *Prisons of Ireland. Fourteenth report of the inspectors general on the state of the prisons in Ireland: 1836*, p. 42; By 1843; 'the doors of the asylum are unfortunately closed against many recent and probably curable cases' due to the numbers of incurables, H.C. 1843 (462), *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-first report of the inspectors general on the state of the prisons in Ireland: 1843*, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> *Waterford Mirror*, 5 April 1835; *Tipperary Free Press*, February 14 1835.

<sup>36</sup> John Carr, *Stranger in Ireland; or, A tour in the southern and western parts of that country in the year 1805* (London, 1806), pp 200-202.

onwards. From 1810 onwards, legislation required that the Inspector of Prisons 'visit and inspect, as often as he shall think fit, all Mad-houses and places where Idiots or Lunatics are confined.'<sup>37</sup> This regular inspection came to be seen, in the early nineteenth century, as a matter of necessity when dealing with custodial institutions in the United Kingdom.<sup>38</sup> In Ireland, increased inspection seems to have been paralleled by changes in the local attitude to the treatment of the insane, beginning with a number of progressive minded individuals whose opposition to the local House of Industry combined with parliamentary pressure for the construction of a new system to deal with the insane – the District Lunatic Asylums. Following Robert Peel's initiative in March 1817, a committee was established to look specifically into what reformers claimed to be a deplorable lack of lunatic provision in Ireland.<sup>39</sup> The most persuasive and memorable evidence was given on this occasion by Thomas Spring-Rice, himself a Governor for Life of the Limerick House of Industry and whose evidence carried authority because of this close connection with the institution. Spring-Rice was elected as Member of Parliament for Limerick in 1820. But even before he entered parliament, he was already active in drawing attention to the short-comings in the provision, reporting on the state of the lunatic poor in Ireland to the 1817 commission.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the Limerick House of Industry became, in a very negative way, the catalyst for reform since, in the words of Spring-Rice and his supporters, it was synonymous with inhuman conditions for the insane, 'exemplifying the gross defects in the existing arrangements'.<sup>41</sup> This judgement may not have been entirely fair, however. By the late 1820s, despite serious overcrowding, the inmates were described by the new District Lunatic Asylum manager, John Jackson, as 'well attended to' and 'fed and clothed and as humanely treated as is practicable with such inferior accommodation.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> H.C. 1810 (276), (Ireland.), *A bill [as amended on re-commitment] for repealing the several laws relating to prisons in Ireland; and for re-enacting such of the provisions thereof, as have been found useful, with amendments*, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur Williamson, 'The beginnings of state care for the mentally ill in Ireland', *Economic and Social Review*, 10, (1970), p. 557.

<sup>39</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, xxxv (1817), par.881.

<sup>40</sup> 1817 (430) *Report from the Select Committee on the Lunatic Poor in Ireland: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee and an appendix*, pp. 12-22.

<sup>41</sup> Robins, *Fools*, pp 66, 73.

<sup>42</sup> H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eighth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*, p. 59; H.C.1834 (63), *Prisons of Ireland. Twelfth report of Inspectors General of*

Spring-Rice's approach reflected the contemporary thinking of Robert Peel as well as the earlier exertions of Sir John Newport, M.P. for Waterford, who in the opening years of the nineteenth century had called for reform in the provisions for the care and confinement of the pauper insane. Newport posed the idea of four large-scale asylums to deal with the problem of insanity island-wide.<sup>43</sup> Together, these reformers objected to what they saw as undue state interference and were therefore opposed to a costly full scale poor-law, but believed that state support for the insane and the disabled was justified.<sup>44</sup> Newport's thinking was the basis on which the Irish lunatic asylum system was developed, and was built upon by Spring-Rice, leading to the legislation of 1817. Spring-Rice continued to be responsible over the following four years for amending and consolidating this legislation.<sup>45</sup>

The move towards a district lunatic asylum for Limerick was not, however, a smooth one since local financial and political issues proved problematic. Spring-Rice from the beginning emphasised the importance of establishing a dedicated institution separating the insane from other sick, infirm, charitable, and convict cases but he was the exception among those giving evidence to the 1817 commission. The majority of witnesses and commentators were willing to settle for expansion of Ireland's existing Houses of Industry or for the use of obsolete government-owned buildings, military barracks and infirmaries.<sup>46</sup> This thinking was reflected in provincial papers throughout the island since although the proposed district asylums were seen as progressive institutions, for local commentators often the importance of costs outweighed the

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*Prisons, Ireland: 1834*, p. 30; H.C. 1837 (123), *Prisons of Ireland. Fifteenth report of the Inspectors General on the General State of the Prisons of Ireland, 1836: with appendixes*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Finnane, *Insanity*, pp. 22-25.

<sup>44</sup> Other speakers to the commission included John Leslie Foster, Denis Browne, Maurice Fitzgerald, James Daly, among others.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the select committee on the lunatic poor in Ireland, with minutes of evidence 1817*, pp. 15, 18; Robins, *Fools*, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15 March 1817 (quoting the *Limerick Chronicle*); 'Mr Peel on Tuesday last, moved for the appointment of a Committee to enquire into the state of the Lunatic Poor of this Kingdom; a plan for relief of this class of sufferers has been for some time under serious consideration of Government, and we state from authority that they mean to propose an establishment of from ten to fifteen apartments for this description of sufferers to be attached to each county Infirmary, and to be under the management of the respective surgeons of these.'

necessity of reforming the means and places of care.<sup>47</sup> This was not, of course, unexpected: the economics of care were highly important to reformers, governors, politicians, and local press commentators and over the previous three decades, similar debates regarding the Houses of Industry raged, with very few such institutions being built.<sup>48</sup>

Political considerations in Limerick also negatively affected the publication of the proposed District Lunatic Asylum. Little coverage of Spring Rice's parliamentary exertions on behalf of the mad ever reached the pages of the *Limerick Chronicle*. The Watsons, first Andrew Watson, and from 1810 onwards his son Henry, proprietors of the paper in the early nineteenth century and closely involved with the administration of the House of Industry were hardly likely to print negative and sensational representations of the methods of care employed at an institution under their patronage. It was significant that criticisms did appear in rival local newspapers during the 1830s regarding the *Chronicle's* involvement with the house's finances.<sup>49</sup> It is clear that the Limerick House of Industry was tied up with the Watson's local system of status-enhancing charitable patronage that, in Limerick as elsewhere, was an intrinsic part of the representation of the self as a moral and humanitarian individual. Side by side with this desire to be charitable to those less fortunate was a need to be known to be so inclined.<sup>50</sup> Those involved in the new district asylum were as aware of this as had been those running the House of Industry: John Jackson, the governor appointed to the asylum in 1825, became involved soon after his appointment in the local charitable sphere, donating to the Indigent Room-Keepers' Society and the Female Orphan Society within weeks of the opening in 1827.<sup>51</sup> No doubt,

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<sup>47</sup> Similar debates occurred regarding the proposed building of lunatic asylums in Wicklow, Donegal, Clonmel and Waterford. Denis Phelan commented on these on-going debates in the *Tipperary Free Press*, February 14, 18 1835.

<sup>48</sup> Finnane, *Insanity*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Limerick Evening Herald*, May 30 1835; *Limerick Standard*, 30 January, 2 February 1838. The *Standard* complained of the money that the *Chronicle* received for printing reports of meeting and calls for subscriptions regarding the house. The *Standard* also took issue with the *Chronicle* for printing the names individuals as being present at governors' meetings when they were allegedly not present.

<sup>50</sup> Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004), pp 2-3, 109, 157; Gary A. Boyd, *Dublin 1745-1922, hospitals, spectacle and vice* (Dublin, 2006), pp 63-65; Maria Luddy 'Women and charitable organisations in nineteenth century Ireland', *Women's Studies international forum*, Vol.11 (No.4, 1988), pp 301-305.

<sup>51</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 3, 17 February 1827.

this was an important step to promote among the Limerick local elite the standing of the new costly government-initiated institution for the mad.

There is little doubt that the Watsons deliberately avoided publicising the new asylum. Aside from sporadic reporting of the governors' meetings, publication of annual reports or visits to that institution by genteel or prominent individuals, no other information was published in the *Chronicle* on the Asylum's methods of care, management, the process of confinement, or the names of those confined.<sup>52</sup> There were some random reports of individuals breaking out from the asylum, but these were more a matter of scare-mongering and perhaps discrediting the institution, while multiple break-outs from the House of Industry were never mentioned in the press.<sup>53</sup> For every ten reports that covered an aspect of the House of Industry's day to day affairs the reader of the *Chronicle* was lucky to read one report regarding the new local lunatic asylum. In 1827, the year of opening, for instance, the *Chronicle* carried only four reports or advertisements concerning the new asylum while reports on the House exceeded sixty, averaging over one a week.<sup>54</sup>

This local press silence regarding the proposed new asylum has a further political explanation, i.e. the direction taken by Spring-Rice's political career at this time. In 1820 he had been involved the triumph of the Independent party, which represented the local merchant interest and broke a well-established, conservative oligarchy that had dominated Limerick politics for many years.<sup>55</sup> The *Chronicle* proprietors, the Watsons, on the other hand, well established conservative figures, were supporters of the defeated Vereker faction. Whilst aware of the political exertions of Spring-Rice on behalf of the city once he had been elected, the Watsons were hard-pressed to forgive the very public attack on their publication and its target audience when, on the occasion of his election victory, Spring-Rice had been chaired by his supporters through the city to the front door of the *Chronicle's* offices.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the Watsons were Freemasons, the Limerick Lodge being one of the oldest Masonic lodges in the country. Some of the most

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<sup>52</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 January, 1833.

<sup>53</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 January 1833. In 1789, for instance, of the twenty-six inmates of the House of Industry described as 'insane', thirteen absconded from the institution; Logan and Fleming, *Pauper Limerick*, pp 72-75.

<sup>54</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 20, 24, 27 January, 3 February 1827.

<sup>55</sup> Potter, *Government and people*, pp. 271-272.

<sup>56</sup> Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its history and antiquities* (Limerick, 1866), p. 497.

prominent men in the city and county were part of this Lodge, including members of the dominant but slipping Vereker faction, the influential Barringtons, former proprietor John Ferrar and members of the Maunsell family. Spring-Rice, significantly, was not a member and his lack of involvement in influential local clubs and groups may have contributed to the *Chronicle* deliberately ignoring his public campaign against the House of Industry.<sup>57</sup>

When the doors of Limerick district Asylum (by then known as St Joseph's Hospital) finally close in 2013 it will mark the end of an era. Although few records of the Limerick asylum are available for the pre-famine period it is possible through parliamentary reports, newspaper coverage and public and private contemporary writings to decipher and detail the approach, size, design, governors and patient numbers for the period. Once a site for the asylum was acquired in 1821, the builders Williams and Cockburn won the contract, having the lowest quotation but having also built the asylum at Armagh.<sup>58</sup> A foundation stone was laid on 14 May 1824. The asylum was built of limestone with four wings radiating out from a central octagon. It was 429 feet wide and 314 in depth and could accommodate 150 patients.<sup>59</sup> The Limerick District Lunatic Asylum, which initially served the counties of Limerick, Clare, and Kerry, was completed in 1826 at a cost of £35,490. Separate asylums were later built in Killarney (1852) and Ennis (1868). The Limerick Asylum provided accommodation for 150 patients and opened on 8 January 1827 on Mulgrave Street on the periphery of the city.<sup>60</sup> Rules drawn up for Armagh were adopted and the staff included a matron, attendants, servants, gatekeepers, cooks, hall porters and yard keepers. The moral manager, who lived in the asylum and was responsible for its day-to-day administration, was John Jackson. His wife, Eliza, was the first matron even though she did not have any formal qualifications for the role.

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<sup>57</sup> David Lee, 'James and George Pain – gothic architects' in Lee and Gonzalez (eds.), *Georgian Limerick*, p. 231.

<sup>58</sup> Judith Hill, 'Barracks, asylum and model school: public architecture in limerick from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century' in Liam Irwin et al (Eds.), *Limerick history and society* (Dublin, 2009), p. 288.

<sup>59</sup> Elaine O'Malley, 'Governors, staff and lunatics: life in the Limerick district Asylum 1827-1901' in *Old Limerick Journal*, No. 44, Winter 2010, p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> The asylum's location on the edge of the city was similar to that the artillery barracks (1807), county infirmary (1811) and county gaol (1821).

The 1817 legislative provision of public asylums for Ireland was a facet of social care not seen in France until 1838, or England until 1845 and the asylum was a development that was 'unique among comparable institutions of social control'.<sup>61</sup> It was the first system of public asylums initiated in the western world, a system considered by many, for instance Thackeray (1842) and Harriet Martineau (1852), to be the best available anywhere for the time.<sup>62</sup> The asylum's design was based on an evolving consensus regarding the best practices for the care of the insane, that is, it was designed to reflect the 'moral treatment' principles that had, as we have seen, emerged during this period, and also a (somewhat superficial) staple of press reporting. Ireland's pioneering system of public asylums in the 1820s provided an opportunity for the press to promote the more moral approach to the treatment of insanity. But this was ignored. Instead, during for instance the period of construction, the local press focused on the speed and the 'forward state' of the work that was progressing to such an extent by 1824 that the 'the men employed were liberally treated with bread, cheese and porter' by the Commissioners.<sup>63</sup>

If a more moral approach was utilized to promote a public understanding of lunacy within medical, parliamentary and legal discussions, the intellectual and social constraints inherent in this ideal are exposed and challenged by an examination of the method and lack of coverage on the opening of the asylum. One of the most important arenas for promotion of public identities was provided by local charitable organisations. Influential members of the public and urban elite could present themselves as benevolent and genteel citizens with an investment in local civic and county organisations, and through this involvement were seen to be fulfilling those responsibilities to the moral improvement of society that came with their imagined status.<sup>64</sup> The *Chronicle* was more concerned with covering the establishment of a new

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<sup>61</sup> E. Fuller Torrey and Judy Miller, *Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present* (New York, 2007), p. 125; Mark Finnane, *Insanity*, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 January 1827.

<sup>63</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 May 1824.

<sup>64</sup> James Kelly, 'Charitable societies: their genesis and development, 1720-1800' in James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell, *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 89-109.

local charitable organisation – The Society for the Relief of Sick and Indigent Room-Keepers – on the day the asylum opened.<sup>65</sup>

The corporation under the control of the Smyth-Vereker families and their supporters, including the Watsons, owners of the *Chronicle*, and D.F.G O' Mahony, one of Watson's business partners, were among the largest donors to this new local charity, contributing £20, £10 and £10 respectively (although if all members of this political faction are taken into account. donations exceeded £100). In fact so 'sensible and liberal was the spirit that pervaded the entire assembly that once a list was opened in the room over £210 were entered in donations and £60 in annual subscriptions'.<sup>66</sup> While Spring-Rice and Newport referred to the grandeur and public and county pride associated with the opening of the asylum, the lack of press coverage countered this idea.<sup>67</sup> A reader of the *Chronicle* in 1827 would have been more inclined to view the establishment of the Society for the Relief of the Indigent Room-keepers as a more important event than the opening of only the second ever public asylum for lunatics in the western world.

Local bishop John Jebb's letter to his friend Mrs Beatty in January 1827 (the week the asylum opened) further highlights the importance of local public reputation and status. Jebb writes that even though he was involved with the newly established lunatic asylum, that, 'To-day I am to be engaged in the founding of a society that takes up much of my time for the relief of sick indigent room keepers. [He notes that he...] made the proposition but last week and have received great encouragement'.<sup>68</sup>

The Lord Lieutenant appointed the governors to the asylum and the board of governors was answerable to the board of control in Dublin. Thomas Spring Rice was among the first governors appointed in 1822. This centrally initiated appointment of governors was later objected to by the Limerick Corporation as it gave local rate-payers

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<sup>65</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 January 1827. This new body was a benevolent society that enabled, 'one universal feeling of the most cordial approbation to pervade every class of the community...and enabled a true and proper discrimination between objects worthy of relief and beings who conjure up tales of woe to impose on the benevolence and the humane.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, 27 January 1827.

<sup>67</sup> 1827; letter from Thomas Spring Rice to John Newport, Newport MS. 7: Newport Manuscripts: A collection of letters and other papers relating to the public and private affairs of Sir John Newport (Queens University Belfast).

<sup>68</sup> C Foster and J Jebb, *The life of John Jebb, bishop of Limerick, Ardfert and Aghadoe, with a selection from his letters*, (London, 1837), p. 405.

no power in the running of the institution.<sup>69</sup> It was believed that the methods of appointing governors were ‘probably the most anomalous part of the system’.<sup>70</sup> The exclusion of Catholics from the boards and from the staff was ‘not the fault of the people or the local gentry’ as ‘all officers are appointed by the Irish Executive’.<sup>71</sup>

The Inspector General’s reports are a valuable insight into the status and function of the new asylum. James Palmer, Inspector General of Prisons, noted that the new asylums could be viewed as the establishment of ‘a national school for discovering the best mode of treating the disease’ and was of the opinion that the new system was ‘not equalled in Europe or America.’<sup>72</sup> He also claimed that no doubt could remain as to the ‘utility of such establishments’ and this hypothesis was augmented through the positive reports of visitors to the asylum.<sup>73</sup> Reports consistently stressed the cleanliness and ‘excellent state’ of the asylum.<sup>74</sup> Hill has noted that in the prospectus of the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* in 1845 it was remarked that ‘in its exterior the building might be the residence of a nobleman’.<sup>75</sup>

The attitude of reformers like Spring-Rice was that the approach to the treatment of lunacy in the new Asylums should be very different from that pursued in Houses of

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<sup>69</sup> Elaine O’Malley, ‘Governors, staff and lunatics: life in the Limerick district Lunatic Asylum 1827-1901’, Unpublished M.A thesis, (University of Limerick, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Bianconi, *Report of the parliamentary committee of the loyal repeal association on the returns of the district lunatic asylums in Ireland; read at meeting of the Association on Monday 18 July 1845* (Dublin, 1845), p. 7

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*, pp 8-9

<sup>72</sup> H.C. 1842 (377), *Prisons of Ireland. Twentieth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1841, with appendixes* p. 4; ‘I am quite satisfied that our provincial asylums in Ireland are superior to anything in Europe of the kind’, H.C. 1830 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Eight report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*, p. 59.

<sup>73</sup> Major James Palmer, *A treatise on the modern systems of governing goals, penitentiaries and houses of correction, with a view to moral improvement and reformation of character; Also, a detail of some of the duties of each department of a prison together with some observations on the state of prison discipline, at home and abroad, and a view on the management of lunatic asylums* (Dublin, 1832), p. 75; ‘these benevolent institutions are conspicuous [as models of good and moral governance] and have been reported by many strangers who have visited them from England and the continent, and who have gone so far as to state that the care and cure of lunatics are better understood and practiced in Ireland than in any other part of the world. That the Limerick institution is inferior to none, it is necessary to report, in common justice to the present managers, Mr and Mrs Jackson’, H.C. 1832 (67), *Prisons of Ireland. Tenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1831-32*, p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*, p. 58.

<sup>75</sup> Hill, ‘Barracks, asylum and model school’, p. 293.

Industry like that of Limerick.<sup>76</sup> However, the continuity between the two types of institution was as obvious as their differences. In both, the emphasis on ‘moral management’ and discipline was obvious. In 1783, the ideology of the House of Industry was characterised by a strongly religious note and an emphasis on the moral union between the providers and recipients of care.<sup>77</sup> As the *Limerick Chronicle* expressed it, pushing the contrasting images of a grateful deserving poor on the one hand, and dissolute and undeserving paupers on the other,

‘Notwithstanding the malevolent aspersions of the idle and the ignorant, who never saw or considered the happy effects of the Charity...the 2511 persons who have found an Asylum in the House since its foundation can now say, in the words of our Lord: “I was hungered, and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me Drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in, Naked, and ye clothed me”’.<sup>78</sup>

The religious note was enforced by the emphasis on putting lunatic inmates to work as a means of healing bodily and mental illness.<sup>79</sup> As Digby concluded in her study of York Asylum, ‘the values imposed [through work] were an attempt to make the asylum a microcosm of the accepted social world [lunatics] hoped to re-enter.’<sup>80</sup> In fact, the Limerick House of Industry, despite its name, initially functioned less as a place of work than as a place of refuge and confinement. Although the regulations of the House stipulated that the able-bodied poor should be subject to a work regime whilst resident within the house, there is little to indicate that any such regime existed in the early years, though some inmates were occasionally assigned duties in the kitchen or garden. It was only in 1799, possibly as a response to the legislation of the previous year, that the governors sought to employ a person to oversee unspecified work then underway in the

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<sup>76</sup> 1817 (430), *Report from the select committee on the lunatic poor in Ireland: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee and an appendix*, pp. 19-21; see also the preface to Hallaran, *Observations*, 1818, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>77</sup> Christine Gonzalez, ‘the Limerick House of Industry’ in Lee and Gonzalez (eds.), *Georgian Limerick*, p. 169.

<sup>78</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 April 1783.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of the importance of employment in institutions see Finnane, *Insanity*, pp 24-25; Richard A. Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel, the life and legacy* (London, 2010), pp. 32-26, 64; John Bew, *The glory of being Britons, civic unionism in nineteenth-century Belfast* (Dublin, 2009), p. 78.

<sup>80</sup> Digby, *Madness, morality and medicine*, p. 63.

institution.<sup>81</sup> This focus on ‘putting to work’ was part of the state’s approach to the treatment not only of lunatics but also of criminals.<sup>82</sup> Despite its initial failure in relation to the House of Industry, it did have some practical effects by the time of the opening of the new asylum in 1827. In the mornings all of the able-bodied had to work at occupations such as weaving, spinning, opening up hair for upholsters, and picking oakum for ship chandlers. A third of the profit from these labours was given to workers, a quarter to the house steward, and the remainder of the funds channelled back into the institution, suggesting that the purpose of such work was not just therapeutic but was deemed essential to the economic survival of the institution.<sup>83</sup>

Just as with the religious and moral attitudes to the care of lunatics, this emphasis on the beneficial effects of work was promoted by the local press, as in a poem entitled ‘The way to be happy’ published in the *General Advertiser* in 1816:

‘Some think it a hardship to work for their bread,  
Although for our good it was meant...  
An honest employment brings pleasure and gain  
And makes us our troubles forget  
For those who work hard have no time to complain  
And tis better to labour than fret!  
We only need labour as hard as we can,  
For all that our bodies may need;  
Still doing our duty to God and to man,  
And we shall be happy indeed!’<sup>84</sup>

‘Usefulness’ was one of the key concepts in this approach to the insane: when the Frys visited the House of Industry in 1828, they appear to have been favourably impressed by the running of the institution, her brother, Joseph Gurney, noting how he ‘visited this useful institution in company with my sister, Elisabeth Fry, and we are much pleased

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<sup>81</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper*, p. xiii; *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 May 1794.

<sup>82</sup> The Inspector General of Prisons annual reports complained for much of the 1830s of the lack of organised work for the inmates of Limerick’s City Gaol. H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*, p. 59; H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eighth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*, p. 58.

<sup>83</sup> Paddy Lysaght, ‘The House of Industry’ in *Old Limerick Journal*, Vol. 4, September 1980, p. 21.

<sup>84</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 19 March 1816.

with it. It appears extremely desirable that the worthy Alderman Watson's efforts should be yet more extensively supported.'<sup>85</sup>

This emphasis on the importance of industry and employment in both a therapeutic and practical sense continued into the opening decades of the nineteenth century to influence the thinking of those dealing with the insane. Indeed, these ideas seem to have been integral to the running of the new Limerick pauper District Asylum on Mulgrave Street from its opening in January 1827.

By 1833, it was clear that the local press, whatever the reservations of its proprietors towards the new institution before its establishment, now echoed this thinking in its columns, pointing out 'a very laudable characteristic' of the asylum:

'... The inmates by their own labour in the garden produced 110 barrels of potatoes in the last year. The admissions...[are] more numerous...yet the discharges exceeded any former number. Employment seems to have made the most favourable change in the intellect of the patients generally, and the system of interior economy observed in the establishment has been productive of the best effects'.<sup>86</sup>

The Inspector General's reports, too, continually emphasised the importance of work in the new asylum, which was described year after year as a model institution, run on the 'best principles' and where 'employment, kindness, moral government and freedom from all restraints' were the basis of treatment.<sup>87</sup> 'Discipline, cleanliness, obedience and work' were listed in 1827 as the vital means to keep order and regularity in the asylum

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<sup>85</sup> Lysaght, 'House of Industry', p. 22. Similar positive accounts of the House had appeared within the *Chronicle* within a similar time frame after the 1817 legislation was passed. These reports highlighted that valuable contribution that the institution had made to the community over the course of the last 45 years and the significant role that the House had played in clearing the streets of beggars and vagrants; *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 March, 3 April 1817.

<sup>86</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 January 1833; H.C. 1833 (67), *Prisons of Ireland. Eleventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1833*, p. 27; H.C. 1832 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Tenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1832*, p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*, p. 58; H.C. 1830 (48), *Prisons of Ireland. Eighth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1830*, pp 58, 59; H.C. 1840 [240] *Prisons of Ireland. Eighteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1839: with appendixes*, p. 52; The reports noted 'a difficulty this establishment labours under is the want of more ground to employ the lunatics, so necessary to their health and cure. All the other asylums have from ten to fourteen acres, Limerick only has two' H.C. 1834 (63), *Prisons of Ireland. Twelfth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1834*, p. 30; this had been rectified by 1835 when '11 acres of ground have been purchased to give employment to the inmates', H.C. 1835 (114), *Prisons of Ireland. Thirteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1835*, p. 42.

and the reports gave regular progress reports on the development of vegetable production, spinning, sewing, boot repairing and mattress making within the asylum, all the products of this industry being used within the institution itself.<sup>88</sup>

But despite this emphasis on moral government, the view of institutionalised care for the insane as a form of social control, and not just as a rehabilitation method, did not disappear with the establishment of the District Asylum. This had been a feature of the philosophy underpinning the original House of Industry. Despite the more 'progressive' attitude of reformers, of the new asylums disability and inability to work came to rank predominantly among the perceptions regarding the Irish poor. The establishment of the House of Industry in Limerick occurred at precisely the same time that disability and poverty were coming to be criminalised and regulated. Between April and September 1774, while the Limerick House of Industry was under construction, the governors had begun to implement legislation passed two years previously by badging the poor and removing vagrants from the streets, and by accommodating those described as the 'helpless poor' in a disused military base in the city's Irishtown.<sup>89</sup> There was an accompanying clamp down on begging, which especially affected the mentally ill poor who made their living in this way.<sup>90</sup> The measures seem to have had some impact, as in 1789 the *Limerick Chronicle* reported that 'there is now some appearance of decency in our streets, since all sturdy idle vagrants were forced to fly, and many poor persons sent to the poor house.'<sup>91</sup> The newspaper took up the crusade against pauperism, inviting

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<sup>88</sup> Inspector General's Report 1827: 1826 (173), Prisons of Ireland. Fourth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1826, pp 48-49; H.C. 1829 (10), *Prisons of Ireland. Seventh report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland: 1829*; p. 58; H.C. 1837-38 (186), *Prisons of Ireland. Sixteenth report of the inspectors general on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1837: with appendixes*, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30. *Act for badging such poor as shall be found unable to support themselves by labour and otherwise providing for them; and for restraining such as shall be found able to support themselves by labour or industry from begging*. [1771-1772]; Logan and Fleming, *Pauper Limerick*, p. xii.

<sup>90</sup> Fleming and Logan, *Pauper*, p. xiii. *Freeman's Journal*, 17 June 1773.

<sup>91</sup> Drunkenness too was viewed as 'the bane of industry,' and any idle, drunken fellow encountered by the Mayor's sergeants, bailiffs, and constables, and by the house's beadles were to be carried to the house and there 'confined in the cells for fourteen days, and fed on bread and water.' These cells to which the drunk were confined were the lunatic cells and rooms. Street clearances of the miscreant continued (prostitutes in 1805 and 1809, Beggars in 1774, 1814, and 1817).

every citizen of Limerick to unite in this reformation of morals of the lower classes, and then 'vice and wickedness will be vanished from our streets'.<sup>92</sup>

The emphasis on confinement and control, evident in relation to the poor generally, was also obvious in the attitude to the pauper insane within commentators' testimonies to the parliamentary commissions of the early nineteenth century. One of the reasons for the increasing pressure for the admission of lunatics in the House of Industry in early Georgian Ireland general and Limerick specifically was the growing demand to confine the many disturbed and uncontrolled persons who were wandering the country.<sup>93</sup> Spring-Rice, though one of those seeking a more enlightened treatment for lunatics, shared these fears regarding the impact of wandering lunatics on society, and warned in 1817 that failure to make specific provision for the lunatic population of the House of Industry could result in their ending up back on the streets, roaming free.<sup>94</sup> The House of Industry was therefore viewed as much for the protection of society as for the protection of the lunatic.<sup>95</sup> In the absence of institutions for their confinement and care, the mad had been tolerated, but that toleration faded quickly as the system of Houses of Industry offered the possibility of classifying, confining and controlling them. A former tolerance turned into hostility.<sup>96</sup> Far from the wandering lunatic having a place in society, the prospect of the mad wandering the streets came to be used in the press as a means to extract donations for the House from the public. This was clear in the Limerick local press where, from 1792 onwards, appeals for financial support for the institutionalisation of 'the lunaticks [sic]' were accompanied by implicit warnings about the social ills that could result should donations not be forthcoming.<sup>97</sup> This approach did not change with the passing of the new legislation in 1817, the House of Industry appeal

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<sup>92</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 November 1789; Lindsay Granshaw and Roy Porter, *The hospital in history* (London, 1989), p. 56; Jonathan Andrews et al, *The history of Bethlem* (London, 2013), p. 334.

<sup>93</sup> Robins, *Fools*, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> 1817 (430), *Report from the select committee on the lunatic poor in Ireland: with minutes of evidence taken before the committee and an appendix*, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Robins, *Fools*, p. 121.

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Hack Tuke, *Chapters in the History of the Insane in the British Isles* (London, 1882), pp. 98-99; John Frederick Archibold, *The new statutes relating to lunacy: comprising the law relating to pauper lunatics, with the practice and practical forms, very fully given; also, the law respecting lunatic asylums, public and private, with the duties of the commissioners in lunacy and visiting justices* (London, 1854), p. 189; Roy Porter, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 104; Jonathan Andrews et al, *The history of Bethlem* (London, 2013), p. 303.

<sup>97</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 October 1792, 16 January 1800.

for funds in that year concentrating on the large proportion of ‘lunaticks or ideots [sic]’ in the institution and the danger of ‘having to turn the wretched inmates onto the street’.<sup>98</sup> Until 1838 the prospect of turning the incurably mad onto the streets of Limerick still dominated the House’s appeals.<sup>99</sup> Madness was used as, and stood for, something other than itself.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, madness was not yet viewed as an illness *per se*. Prior to the opening of the Houses of Industry, insanity had existed at the intersection between disability and impairment in the sense that a ‘disability exists as it is situated in the larger social context, while impairment is a biological condition’.<sup>100</sup> Yet, though ‘used’ for scaremongering tactics recognition of madness increased as the ebb and flow of the numbers of mad in the institution became a matter for press comment. This publicization progressed further with the passing of the 1817 legislation, and increased emphasis was put on the fact that lunatics deemed curable could be put to work for both their own benefit and that of the institution they were resident in.

With increasing institutionalisation, madness, though hidden behind high walls, became visible in another sense: it attracted fledgling psychiatrists travelling from America to Europe, who examined and published their findings on the much published and lauded method of ‘moral-care’ and the aesthetically pleasing large-scale asylums of the nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup> In fact, the Limerick district Asylum, with its ‘extensive capacities and advanced methods of treatment’ received many distinguished guests from Ireland and abroad.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, Limerick press coverage of madness and its treatment was limited by the political and financial considerations discussed in chapter one and earlier in this chapter.

Most important was the partisan nature of the *Limerick Chronicle’s* attitude, a bias shaped by the involvement of its main patrons in the old House of Industry and in the

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid*, 7 June 1817.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*, 29 January 1838.

<sup>100</sup> David L. Braddock and Susan L. Parish, ‘An institutional history of disability’ in Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury (eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (London, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>101</sup> Pliny Earle, *A visit to thirteen asylums for the insane in Europe: to which are added a brief notice of similar institutions in transatlantic countries and in the United States, and an essay on the causes, duration, termination and moral treatment of insanity, with copious statistics* (Philadelphia, 1841).

<sup>102</sup> O’Leary, ‘The treatment of the mentally ill’ in Lee and Gonzalez (eds.), *Georgian Limerick*, p. 335.

city's political networks and which in turn seems to have led to tension between the House and the emerging Lunatic Asylum, the two local institutions catering for the mad.

In the 1820s the Chronicle had little competition, bar the conservative and similarly styled general advertiser. The Advertiser could not directly challenge the Chronicle for fear of losing sales and/or revenue from advertisements. As discussed earlier in this chapter it was not until 1830s that critical reports of the close relationship between the newspaper and the institution began to emerge but even when they do they focus on financial issues more so than any detailed discussion of the methods of care and treatment available in the house. Reports featuring madness or mad individuals usually aligned the affliction with deviant actions as will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: Madness and deviance.

In Georgian and Regency Ireland newspapers were the primary source of public information about madness and the mad. This chapter suggests that the newspapers played an active role in the development and distribution of a range of negative images of madness for both news and entertainment purposes. The accounts of madness that were most frequently represented on the pages of the Irish press tended to portray the mad as unpredictable, broken, dangerous and unproductive failures who were unable to control their own lives and were not capable of functioning in polite society.<sup>1</sup>

Madness was represented in newspaper reports as a person's main personality trait to the extent that it was the central way of defining that person and explaining any deviant actions on their part.<sup>2</sup> Deviant actions were those that violated and exceeded the social norms and were usually of sufficient gravity to warrant disapproval from the greater part of society. In the early nineteenth century, deviant actions could be criminal or non-criminal, though it was the criminal actions that were principally associated with madness.<sup>3</sup>

When the Irish public read about the mad in the newspapers of this period, they often did so in the context of deviant or criminal activity. Aside from politics, the news most common to all the newspapers concerned crime and violence. Focus on these topics allowed newspapers to present events in the most dramatic and graphic fashion possible.<sup>4</sup> The press was highly selective in its selection of the offenses, offenders and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson discusses the idea of 'unproductive failures' in C. Wilson et al, 'Mental illness depictions in prime-time drama: identifying the discursive resources' in *Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry* Vol.33, no.2 (1999), pp 232-239; Anon. (Marianne Nevil), *Hints upon insanity, especially monomania: by a person supposed insane* (Dublin, 1837), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Olstead, 'Contesting the text: Canadian media depictions of the conflation of mental illness and criminality' in *Sociology of mental health and illness*, Vol. 24, no. 5 (2002), pp 621-43 discusses this in relation to the modern mass media of the late twentieth century.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Walsh argues from a similar standpoint in his evaluation of the mentally ill in modern media, '(Mis)representing mental distress?' in Jill Reynolds et al (eds.), *Mental health still matters* (London, 2009), pp. 135-140.

<sup>4</sup> Yvonne Jewkes, *Media and crime* (London, 2004), p. 40. Jewkes, in her work on modern media, identified twelve structures and values that shape crime news. These are as relevant in a discussion of the press in Georgian and Regency Ireland as they are to twenty-first century news on the multimedia platforms:

crimes reported.<sup>5</sup> The juxtaposition of time, place and the class of those involved made a reported case stand out as extraordinary or exceptional in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For a crime to be reported and to be subject to commentary, the prevailing ideological climate needed to be especially hostile to the offense that had been committed.<sup>6</sup>

The more macabre or sensational a crime, the more likely it was to be included in the pages of the newspapers. Newspaper reports on murder had become so frequent by the early nineteenth century that they were usually brief and lacking in detail, with little follow-up or analysis. The murder of Thomas Murphy from Kilkenny in 1791 was one such incident. Murphy was murdered by his wife while he was asleep in bed. According to the reports in the *Limerick Chronicle* and the *Freeman's Journal*, she had given him a fatal blow to the head while in a fit of jealousy.<sup>7</sup> Neither paper, however, discussed the reasons for her jealousy, and it was the sensational aspects of the crime rather than the underlying reasons that secured it coverage in the press.

Yet, such unexplainable crimes, when they were analysed in any way by the press, tended to be attributed to madness. The newspapers tapped into and magnified deep seated public fears about the deviance and excess of those involved in murder and suicide, and attached the label of insanity to these offenders in a manner that Foucault described as a 'psychiatrization of criminal danger'.<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on the insanity of the perpetrator was, in some press reports, also presented as mitigating the guilt of the killer. This was particularly evident in the case of reports of suicide: self-killing went against the rationalism and reason expected within polite society in late Georgian and Regency Ireland, and insanity was therefore presented as an explanation for the

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threshold, predictability, simplification, individualism, risk, sex, celebrity or high status, proximity, violence, spectacle or graphic imagery, children, conservative ideology and political diversion

<sup>5</sup> For an examination of this theory with regards to the twentieth century media see Jewkes, *Media and crime* pp 53-56, 87-106, 108-109.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 January 1791; *Freeman's Journal*, 24 January 1791.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and civilisation*, p. 128.

shameful and criminal act of suicide.<sup>9</sup> Suicide could be a 'deliberate or desperate deed, a horrid crime perverse or malicious'.<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, at the same time, the increasing sympathy with which suicides were viewed by the public at the close of the eighteenth century meant that attempts had to be made in newspaper reports to rationalise and make sense of the 'offender' who committed this act.<sup>11</sup> The newspaper reports by the early nineteenth century tended to avoid presenting suicide as sinful, and often adopted a sympathetic tone towards the perpetrator – again reflected in the language used – 'regrettable, melancholy distressing and pitiable, a dire catastrophic deed.'<sup>12</sup> In the English context, researchers have noted that this process of the secularization of attitudes to suicide was actually assisted by the growth of the periodical press and the spread of literacy after 1700.<sup>13</sup>

The methods of portraying suicides in the newspapers prefigured the ways the insane came to be represented. Representations of insanity, like representations of suicide, should be understood in a socio-cultural and economic context.<sup>14</sup> Suicide, though an individual act, was portrayed as influenced and encouraged by external circumstances. Both suicide and insanity were often seen as by-products of modernity, poverty and the stresses of a modernising society. This depiction was evident not only in medical texts and legal commentaries, but also in the newspapers, where suicide was represented as resulting from emotional and mental upheaval.<sup>15</sup> Suicidal tendencies

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<sup>9</sup> Suicide remained classified as a criminal action in the Republic of Ireland until 1993.

<sup>10</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 May 1824, 29 July 1792; *Limerick General Advertiser*, October 30 1806, 11 April 1819; *Waterford Mirror*, 10 July 1835.

<sup>11</sup> Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy, *Sleepless Souls; Suicide in Early in Modern England* (Clarendon, 1990), p. 229.

<sup>12</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, February 20 1833; *Limerick General Advertiser*, October 10, 1809; *Limerick Evening Post*, 2 May 1818.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Haley York, 'Suicide and the asylum in nineteenth century England', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Forbes Benignus Winslow, *The anatomy of suicide* (London, 1840). Winslow attempted to demonstrate that most suicides are not criminal, but are victims of mental disease; Madame de Staël (Anne-Louise Germaine), *Reflections on Suicide* (London, 1813); Solomon Piggott, *Suicide and Its Antidotes, a Series of Anecdotes and Actual Narratives. with Suggestions on Mental Distress* (London, 1824); William Rowley, *A treatise on madness and suicide, with the mode of determining with precision mental affections in a legal point of view* (London, 1804); *Freeman's Journal*, 28 April 1820, *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 January 1786, 20 May 1826, 11 January 1843, *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 May 1845, 1 May 1850

were, according to the press, generated by a sudden and unexpected event such as disappointment in love, disappointed ambition, the loss of wealth, or shame, all of which were seen as powerful enough to unseat reason and temporarily deprive individuals of their power of reflection.<sup>16</sup> The eighteenth century had been an era of sexual liberation and tolerance. Stories of love, romance and sex sold newspapers in Britain and in Ireland. Stories of eloping wives, extra-marital affairs and unrequited love appeared regularly in popular works of fiction and in the Dublin and Limerick press. Emotions and passions affected an individual's mental state without any preceding organic cerebral derangement. In nearly all cases of suicide reported in the newspapers, there was a major emphasis on the state of the mental faculties.<sup>17</sup> Love, economic misfortune, madness and suicide were separately sensational enough to warrant coverage in the press, but when brought together they were even more enthralling and exciting, especially should any of the involved parties belong in the upper ranks of society.<sup>18</sup>

In 1775 the philosopher David Hume's *Essays on suicide* were posthumously published and the impact of this publication on the national and provincial press was considerable, though there is no evidence that his works were sold in Limerick city at this period.<sup>19</sup> Hume argued that suicide did not contradict one's obligation to God, to fellow humans, or to oneself. By 1780 in London the *Times* had suggested that suicide was a general topic of conversation among all social ranks and over the following decade the debate spread to the Irish newspaper press. Six years later, the *Limerick Chronicle* carried a report sourced from the *Times* (London) announcing a debate, based on Hume's writings and entitled 'Is suicide an act of courage?'<sup>20</sup> This was followed by a long article

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<sup>16</sup> Headline in *Limerick Standard*, 9 June 1835; 'Gambling – Madness – Suicide'; this article discussed the propensity of those that gambled to become so mentally anguished that many cases ended up taking their own lives. Similar terminology used included 'a paroxysm of jealousy...deserted by her second husband...temporary insanity brought on by adverse circumstances...insanity supposed to have been occasioned by some malicious report in reference to her character'; *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 September, 1808, *Limerick General Advertiser*, 22 August 1805, *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 January, 1843, *Nenagh Guardian*, 7 May 1845.

<sup>17</sup> 'He conducted himself as if something affected his mind – Lunacy'; 'exhibited signs of insanity'; 'he was said to be in a state of despondency for three to four days previous to his perpetration of the desperate deed'; 'prayed so intently on his mind so as to produce temporary derangement'; 'too late for any hope of restoring the senses by medical intervention', *Limerick General Advertiser*, 3 March 1808, *Freeman's Journal* 8 December 1820, *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 May 1792, 20 May 1820.

<sup>18</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 October, 20 October 1791.

<sup>19</sup> David Hume, *Essays on suicide* (London, 1775).

<sup>20</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 March 1786.

entitled 'Dissuasive against suicide', urging readers, whether their life was miserable, deviant or boring, not to act hastily as everybody had the capacity to change.<sup>21</sup>

In Limerick's local press, the English were viewed as having an over-propensity towards suicide, and this underlying belief continued over the following two decades with articles covering the excessive numbers of self-killings in England, and the favourite means and locations (sometimes even the precise laneways) most associated with suicide in England.<sup>22</sup> The *General Advertiser* of the first week of November 1805 printed in three successive issues a list and details of the 'excessive' numbers of suicides in one week in England.<sup>23</sup> One motive for the newspapers' publication of such articles was national one-upmanship, i.e. the wish to show that the Irish were more balanced than the English: the *General Advertiser's* article of Saturday 1 November ended with the jibe – 'So much for the *published* occurrences of one week in the most civilised country in Europe!!!'<sup>24</sup> The report in 1805 closed with a semi-comic poem entitled 'P.M.'s reasoning on the Crime of Suicide':

As Man is property of God,  
One should himself not even prod;  
So that he makes, I clearly see,  
Who's cut his throat-damnation free.<sup>25</sup>

Three decades later, the English were still portrayed in the Irish provincial press as being prone to suicide and consequently being over-concerned with life insurance. In 1839, for example, the *Limerick Reporter* included a satirical piece describing the 'London

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<sup>21</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 March 1786. This was in direct response to a case of murder recently heard at the Old Bailey where the accused had pleaded to be allowed to take his life instead of facing an execution sentence.

<sup>22</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 8 May 1808, *Limerick Evening Post*, 5 June 1811.

<sup>23</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 3 November 1805. The list included five females who had hanged or drowned themselves in the neighbourhood of London; a suspected murderer who had hanged himself; and a boy who had beaten his own brains out with a hammer; a Jew who had cut his throat 'in a shocking manner' in a hackney coach; a French immigrant who had thrown himself into Paddington canal; an unnamed woman who had attempted a similar method of killing herself at the river near Colebrook; and an unnamed captain of a frigate who had somehow survived after cutting his throat from ear to ear and slashing his arms in a desperate attempt to bleed to death. The representation of certain nationalities as having an over propensity towards suicide will be discussed further in the section of the thesis that deals with the theories of the 'Other'.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 9 November 1805.

Suicide Company' whose three directors were Graves, Knell and Gravesend. This satirical piece was, in fact, lifted directly from the contemporary English periodical, *Bentley's Miscellany* of 1839.<sup>26</sup> The journal included a three-page section purportedly floating a new insurance company that aimed at facilitating suicide, and offered exclusive sites for convenient exercise of self-murder. The offer included the promise to open the Penitentiary of Milbank for 'deepening the gloomy feelings of such subscribers who may not have completely made up their minds'.<sup>27</sup>

The need to protect property and inheritance played a part in shaping attitudes to the links between insanity and suicide. This was obvious in the changing terminology used in the press, from *felo de se* to that of *non-compos mentis*.<sup>28</sup> The legal system required an inquest to decide whether a suicide was guilty of a *felo de se* (a felony against self) or *non-compos mentis* (innocent by reason of insanity). The term *felo de se* highlighted the criminal aspect of suicide. By 1832 *felo de se* was considered an archaic legal term derived from early English common law, where an adult who committed suicide was a felon, and the crime was punishable by forfeiture of property to the crown.<sup>29</sup> In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, suicide came to be seen more and more as an act of temporary insanity, and many coroners' juries began declaring more suicide victims as *non-compos mentis* rather than *felo de se*. The increasing use of the newer term is generally considered to have been a strategy deployed by juries so that the suicide's property was not forfeited to the crown and the

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<sup>26</sup> *Limerick Reporter*, 19 January 1839. Richard Bentley began the journal in 1836 and invited Charles Dickens to be its first editor. Dickens serialized his second novel *Oliver Twist* but soon fell out with Bentley over editorial control. He quit as editor in 1839. Aside from the works of Dickens other significant authors published in the magazine included: Wilkie Collins, Catharine Sedgwick, Thomas Moore, Thomas Love Peacock, William Mudford, and some of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. It was also the first place to publish cartoons by John Leech, who became a prominent *Punch* cartoonist.

<sup>27</sup> Ron Brown, *Art of Suicide* (London, 2001), p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> Malcolm Macdonald 'The Secularization of Suicide in England, 1660-1800', *Past and Present*, No. 111, May 1986, pp. 50-55; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 288-290.

<sup>29</sup> The suicide was given a shameful burial – typically they were buried with a stake through their heart and at a crossroads instead of in a graveyard. Burials took place at night with no mourners or clergy present and the location was often kept secret by the authorities. A child or mentally incompetent person who killed themselves was not, however, considered to have committed *felo de se* and was not punished post-mortem for his actions.

suicide's family could inherit the property.<sup>30</sup> By 1800, suicides were routinely written off as insanity.

MacDonald and Murphy, in their study of Norwich, noted that the verdict of *non-compos mentis* had become 'the usual verdict in cases of suicide by the last third of the [eighteenth] century'.<sup>31</sup> There seems to have been a time-lag in the use of the verdict in the Irish case, since in the Irish press, the more archaic term *felo de se* still appeared as late as 1832, when the *Limerick Evening Herald* included an article on 'Deliberate Suicide', referring to the verdict reached by a Dublin jury in relation to a suicide case.<sup>32</sup> *Felo de se* was used here as suicide had occurred in conjunction with another criminal action. This link between criminality and suicide was evident in the *Limerick Evening Herald's* report. A clerk formerly employed by 'a respectable firm in Dublin' had been awaiting trial for theft when he took his own life. The individual's guilt was viewed by the magistrates as being retrospectively confirmed by his suicide, allowing them to return the verdict of *felo de se*.<sup>33</sup>

In England, if the suicide had not been criminally involved, mental illness was used as a means of explaining or justifying the self-killing, though sympathy for the victim depended to a great extent on their social class.<sup>34</sup> The Irish provincial newspapers similarly suggest that attitudes to suicide depended on the social rank of those involved. Upper class individuals who killed themselves were portrayed as having been overwhelmed by intense anguish and overcome with an irresistible impulse to escape their despair by committing suicide. Lower-class suicides were not subject to the same sympathetic press treatment as were their wealthier counterparts. It was also acceptable within the newspapers of Limerick and the provinces to identify by name individuals who had succeeded in killing themselves, but again the willingness to name was determined by a few factors, particularly social rank and also their belonging or not to local society.

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<sup>30</sup> Latin for 'Not of sound mind'.

<sup>31</sup> MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls* p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> Latin for 'felon of himself'.

<sup>33</sup> *Limerick Evening Herald*, 12 September 1832.

<sup>34</sup> York, 'Suicide and the asylum', p. 4.

This is also evident in the provincial press outside Limerick In an interesting sympathetic depiction of suicide that appeared in the *Waterford Mirror* on 11 February 1835:

These are the brief particulars of perhaps the most extraordinary suicide in the world's records. This heroic woman had a deep insight into the nature of her husband's malady; she felt and knew that nothing but a real and lasting sorrow could give another direction to his thoughts [he suffered from a nervous disposition] and save him from madness; and she offered herself a willing sacrifice to his happiness. It is perhaps still more extraordinary that from this eventful moment he has recovered; the physicians declare that no medicine could have worked with half such potency on mind or body. He feels himself strong and able to fulfil her last declared wishes, and to accomplish those great projects which heretofore he merely contemplated and speculated on. Since her death he has written some beautiful verses...'<sup>35</sup>

This almost heroic representation of the taking of a life reflected themes more appropriate to romantic literature than to a newspaper report on insanity and suicide. The report depicted un-named individuals in an anonymous location and was as much an entertaining tale as it was a window into public understanding of the connections between mental turmoil and suicide. It also suggests that such heroic portrayals applied only to suicide in refined society. In the case of suicides further down the social ladder, sensationalist accounts were more common. In the same edition of the *Waterford Mirror* there was a return to the macabre, gruesome and detailed information on the methods of self-destruction that often characterised reports of lower class suicides. Michael Doyle, a Graigue lighter-man, had killed himself in the cabin of his boat and unlike the previous report's romanticized view of suicide as a 'willing sacrifice', the *Mirror* graphically reported that he 'fastened himself to a nail on the roof of the cuddy, over his bed, and allowed his feet to hang down the end of the bed, by which extraordinary means he contrived to put an end to his existence'. The jury at the inquest into Doyle's

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<sup>35</sup> *Waterford Mirror*, 11 February 1835.

self-destruction returned a verdict of suicide by hanging and strangling, 'he being at the time of unsound mind and in a state of insanity'.<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes, if the attempt at suicide proved unsuccessful, the individual's sanity was not questioned. In October 1807 the *Limerick General Advertiser* reported that John Tailor, a corporal of the 7<sup>th</sup> Foot, then in Limerick on a recruiting drive, had attempted to end his life by cutting his throat with a razor. He was stopped from doing so by two other soldiers who happened upon him as he was in the process. Only a few nights previously, according to the *Advertiser*, Tailor had attempted to drown himself, only to be saved from doing so by a passer-by. As Tailor's attempts to kill himself were unsuccessful and he lived, there was no mention of insanity in the report. But this omission of any extenuating circumstances – and the lack of any attempt to mask Tailor's identity – was also because of his low social rank and his position as an outsider in Limerick society:<sup>37</sup>

Sensationalism appears to have been the main motive in reporting suicides within the lower class right through the period under review. In 1818 the *Limerick Evening Post* reported on the suicide of a girl of 'about thirteen years old'. She had been working 'in service' and when told she was no longer required she had hung herself and was found 'upon her knees, in the calves' house, quite dead, with a rope around her neck, one end tied to a beam'. This was not explained away as the result of insanity but was reported purely for the sensational aspects of the event. The suicide of 'the poor girl' – never referred to by name – got minimal coverage. The position of the report also showed the lack of importance attached to the case: it was included in the bottom corner of the page dominated by the coverage of the high-profile suicide of Dr Richard Croft (discussed later in this chapter).<sup>38</sup>

Where a suicide occurred within the lower class of the immediate locality, there was a willingness to name the victim, but also to excuse their action as being a result of insanity. When a recently unemployed man, Francis Hehir, hung himself at his home in Thomondgate, Limerick, although the jury at the coroner's inquest returned a verdict on this 'wretched man' as 'found hanged' and never mentioned insanity, the *Limerick*

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 9 October 1807.

<sup>38</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 6 November 1818.

*Chronicle* reported that the loss of employment ‘preyed so intensely on his mind so as to produce temporary derangement’. Hehir was outside the editors’ social sphere and was not a member of the paper’s target audience, so why was his suicide explained by temporary insanity? Perhaps it was his residence’s proximity to the offices of the newspaper that explains the newspaper’s sensitivity on this occasion, but as Hehir was a man of low social status it was more likely that the paper used this as a chance to highlight the need to promote employment in the city.<sup>39</sup>

The location in which a suicide occurred seems to have been particularly significant in determining whether the provincial press printed the name of the victim. This meant that even elite suicides, if they occurred far enough away, could be given considerable attention and the victim named without hesitation. The suicide of Sir Richard Croft was widely reported in the national and provincial newspapers in 1818. When Princess Charlotte died during child-birth her death weighed heavily on Croft as he had been the physician chosen to attend her. On 13 February 1818 Croft, then aged fifty-six, shot himself.<sup>40</sup> For days after the event, there was considerable coverage in the local Limerick press of Croft’s last days. The sensational aspects of the suicide made it worthy of a mass of column inches. The reports sourced from London were deemed worthy of front-page coverage and were continued on page two throughout the following week. Letters from concerned Irish citizens and from correspondents closer to the scene of the tragedy appeared regularly on the inner pages immediately following the report and intermittently over the next two weeks as further details and rumours trickled out.<sup>41</sup> Such was the desire of the public for information that a week after the main reports of the coroner’s inquest appeared in the Limerick newspapers, the front page of the *Limerick Evening Post* was still directing its readers to the second page of the paper to find ‘the particulars of this melancholy event’.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 May 1826; Michael Patrick Deegan ‘Limerick merchants: a social and economic study of the mercantile and maritime trade in Limerick, c. 1800-1905’, Unpublished M.A. thesis, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, 2010, pp. x, 158.

<sup>40</sup> Next to his body a copy of Shakespeare’s *Love’s labour’s lost* was found. It was left open on the passage from Act V, scene II, ‘Fair Sir, God save you! Where is the Princess?’.

<sup>41</sup> *Limerick Chronicle* 17, 21, 24, 28 February 1818, *Limerick Evening Post*, 21, 28 February 1818.

<sup>42</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 2, 6, 9, 13 November 1818.

The role of madness in Croft's suicide was emphasised, and the press was at pains to prove Croft's 'mental distress' and 'derangement of intellect' in order to explain what was regarded as the shameful act of suicide by someone of such high social position.<sup>43</sup> Geographical distance from the event also played a part in the reporting of this incident. A letter from London reproduced in the *Limerick Evening Post* contained more strongly worded accounts of Croft's temporary derangement than did the reports sourced from the English newspapers that appeared in the same publication.<sup>44</sup> This anonymous 'London letter' was the only account of the incident to link Croft's actions with insanity: 'he became deranged, approaching a state of insanity' Croft's suicide provided the Limerick press with the opportunity to sensationalise the event in all its macabre glory and to publish articles that could have been libellous had the victim not died. Croft was well connected enough to warrant extended coverage, yet the fact that he was unknown in Ireland made detailed and relatively graphic reporting possible.

Where a suicide was linked with illicit sexual behaviour, the sensational value was doubled. Thus, considerable press attention was given in 1791 to an apparently incestuous affair between an uncle and niece, which was exposed whilst they were travelling aboard a ship, the *Earl Fitzwilliam*, from Madras to Ireland in September of that year. Unnamed by the press, the lady was apparently entitled to a fortune of £60,000. The pair was 'suspected as having a partiality towards each other that far too much exceeded the attachment suitable to the nature of their affinity'.<sup>45</sup> When this affair was exposed the gentleman and lady remained in their apartment, which they had locked to prevent intrusion. After three days, passengers noticed a great effusion of blood flowing from under the door of their apartment. The door was broken down and both uncle and niece were found dead with a pistol lying between them. So sensational was this double suicide that the *Chronicle* included an additional piece of commentary to the main report on the incident. This commentary detailed the whole sordid affair in colourful detail. The paper used the information and the rumours surrounding the

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> The *Limerick Evening Post* sourced its accounts of Croft's suicide from the *Morning Chronicle*, *Courier* and the *Globe*; 21 February 1818.

<sup>45</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 October 1791.

suicides' relationship to conclude that 'an act of suicide more deliberately perpetrated...does not perhaps occur in the annals of desperation'.<sup>46</sup>

The representation of suicide by those deemed insane, more than the representation of madness generally, was influenced by issues of gender. From Limerick to London, women were depicted as favouring drowning as means of self-murder.<sup>47</sup> In August 1792 the *Limerick Chronicle* reported that a woman 'supposed to be disordered in her senses' had attempted to drown herself on the previous Friday. She was saved by two passers-by. Although seemingly thankful for the rescue, she contrived to hang herself later that same day. Four days later the paper carried a report on the suicide by drowning in Limerick of Mrs Sullivan, from Waterford, whose 'mental faculties' had for some time been 'deranged'.<sup>48</sup> Within Limerick, city, situated as it was on the River Shannon, so high was the incidence of death by drowning that a committee was set up in late August 1792 among members of the local corporation and prosperous local freemen including Andrew Watson to investigate the frequency of these 'apparently' accidental deaths.<sup>49</sup> Subscriptions were solicited from the public by the committee through newspaper advertisements and appeals and donations were collected at the offices of the *Chronicle* to purchase the 'proper apparatus' from London to help save people from drowning. The committee also intended to procure the latest publications on the subject.<sup>50</sup>

Yet the allure of drowning to suicidal women continued, at least according to the frequency of coverage in the local press of Limerick. On 3 November 1792 a 'handsome woman' threw herself into the river as a result of a failed love affair and drowned. Even

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 February 1791; *Limerick General Advertiser*, 1 November 1816; 'On Suicide, Extracted from a treatise of Dr Heyfelder, of Triers' in Thomas Wakley (ed.), *The Lancet, London: A journal of British and foreign medicine, surgery, obstetrics, physiology, chemistry, pharmacology, public health and news*, Volume 2 (London, 1829), p. 103.

<sup>48</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 August 1792.

<sup>49</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* noted the frequency of drowning in Dublin, noting four in the previous week, on 10 November 1792. there was no means of stopping or saving them according to the report; *Freemans Journal*, 10 November 1792, 5 January 1793.

<sup>50</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 August 1792. Callaghan highlights the significant number of news reports that dealt with drowning. Callaghan, *Newspapers and print culture*, pp 215-219; Norwegian seamen were the first to build life-preserving devices, using blocks of wood or cork-stuffed vests. An 1808 issue of *The Universal Magazine*, Volume 10, p. 340 contains a letter from W.H. Mallison trying to gain support for his invention, the Seaman's Friend, but it was not adopted.

in the period following the establishment of the asylum, this choice of drowning as the preferred means of self-murder for women was still the dominant representation in the press. The death of Honora Malony, who threw herself off the cliffs in Kilkee Co. Clare in the 1840s, was widely covered in both provincial and national newspapers.<sup>51</sup> Female suicide by drowning was by no means confined to Limerick. In April 1820 the Dublin and Limerick papers carried reports on the suicide of Ann McDonnell. Having tried and failed to drown herself the previous November, her body was found floating in the river in Dublin on Sunday 22 April 1820. She had, according to all reports, 'exhibited signs of insanity' while employed as a cook for several respectable families in Dublin.<sup>52</sup>

A woman who killed herself while pregnant was more likely to be depicted as bad rather than mad.<sup>53</sup> In August 1792 the *Limerick Chronicle* reported on the suicide, two days earlier, of Mary Cunningham from Ennis, Co. Clare. She was pregnant at the time she hanged herself, a fact that, according to the *Chronicle*, added to the horror of the deed. The report ended by stating that it was 'a melancholy reflection that the infant in the womb is made to suffer for the crimes of its parent'.<sup>54</sup> The taking of a child's life, together with a mother's suicide, was clearly considered to outweigh any mitigating or explanatory factors for these deviant and excessive actions within newspaper reports. When a woman in Sligo killed herself and her three children in 1848 by deliberately walking out into the sea with them, not once were her mental faculties questioned in the press, still less the reasons for her action.<sup>55</sup> Committing suicide in front of one's children was enough to discount the explanation of insanity as an explanation for the criminal act of suicide. Again, the *Limerick General Advertiser* reported on the suicide in the neighbouring town of Ennis by the wife of a labouring man who sent her son to get his father's razor and proceeded to cut her throat upon his return with the implement.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michelle McGoff-McCann, *Melancholy madness: a coroner's casebook* (Cork, 2003), pp 117-118, 133-134; *Limerick Chronicle*, *Nenagh Guardian*, *Freeman's Journal*, *Waterford Mirror*, May 1845.

<sup>52</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 May 1820; *Freeman's Journal*, 28 April 1820.

<sup>53</sup> Pauline Prior has shown how this mad or bad representation veered more towards madness as an explanatory factor for infanticide after the opening of the Central Criminal Lunatic Asylum in Dublin in 1850. Pauline Prior, *Gender and criminal lunacy in nineteenth century Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, 2008); Pauline Prior 'Psychiatry and the fate of women who killed infants and young children 1850-1900' in Catherine Cox and Maria Luddy (eds.), *Cultures of care in Irish medical history 1750-1970* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 92-112.

<sup>54</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 August 1792.

<sup>55</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 8 March 1848.

<sup>56</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 6 January 1815.

This suicide was not explained as an act of temporary insanity. Yet, as always within the press, the style of representation varied with the social rank of the individual involved. An attempted suicide by the pregnant wife of an 'eminent broker' from Plunkett-street, Dublin, was blamed by the *Limerick Chronicle* on the strong symptoms of derangement resulting from her advanced pregnancy and not on her own perceived wickedness.<sup>57</sup> In this case the unborn child was recognised as both the cause and the victim of its mother's madness.

If women reputedly favoured drowning as a means to suicide, press reports presented men as being more likely to shoot or hang themselves. Male suicide was associated with violence, possibly because men had readier access to weapons than did women. Edward Flin's *Limerick Journal* of 13 January 1791 reported on the suicide of a man named Fitzpatrick who had stabbed himself in the belly while 'in the delirium of fever.'<sup>58</sup> The *Limerick Chronicle* of 8 May 1800 carried a report from Waterford on the suicide by hanging of a man named Coffee, and the *General Advertiser* noted the suicide of a musician named Lemon in Derry, who slit his throat with a razor. Insanity was 'supposed' to be the cause.<sup>59</sup> The elite male favoured the expensive, elegant and efficient pistols compared to the knife and rope of the lower ranks.<sup>60</sup> In November 1816 the *General Advertiser* was 'sorry to mention' that James Rafferty, a former governor of the lying-in hospital in Dublin, had shot himself whilst temporarily insane. The *Limerick Evening Post* reported to its readers in May 1818 that a respectable and (un-named) elderly coach maker had 'discharged the contents of a pistol into the side of his head which had an immediate fatal effect'.<sup>61</sup>

If madness was seen as the cause of at least some suicides, it was also presented as an explanation for the murders that were reported in lurid detail in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century press. As in the case of suicide, especially shocking and bloody murders committed outside Limerick always got ample coverage in the local newspapers, as did murders involving well-known public figures or individuals of high

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<sup>57</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 August 1809.

<sup>58</sup> *Limerick Journal*, 13 January 1791.

<sup>59</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 May 1792; *Limerick General Advertiser*, 10 October 1809.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on the availability of firearms see James Kelly, *That damn'd thing called honour, duelling in Ireland 1570-1860* (Cork, 1995), pp 72-76.

<sup>61</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 18 May 1818.

social status. Portraying murderers as insane added to the sensationalism of press reporting. It enabled the portrayal of both the murder and the murderer as evil and outside the boundaries of both human understanding and the value system of polite society – the society of the owners and purchasers of the newspapers.

Yet an examination of press reports of murders committed by those described as insane reveals a more complex picture. The provincial newspapers' responses to such murders, as in their reporting of suicide, illustrate the importance of context in the reporting of murder. The time, place, legal and political circumstances, in addition to the social class and gender of the murderer all influenced depictions of both the crime and the perpetrator.

The limited availability of specific places of confinement for the criminally insane in pre-famine Ireland and the changes in the laws surrounding the use of a plea of insanity in order to evade imprisonment in serious criminal cases were all reflected in the Limerick and Irish newspaper representations of mad murderers, or murderers who claimed to be mad. In such reports, the lunacy of the killer was presented as just another sensational dimension of the murder. The introduction of the lunacy element also reduced the need to discover the motives for the killing since, classified as a lunatic, the murderer forfeited any right to a discussion of their thinking or motivation.<sup>62</sup>

The *Limerick Chronicle* in 1827 covered the case of 'an unfortunate maniac' in Mayo who was reported to have killed his relative with the blow of a candlestick.<sup>63</sup> Similar attention was given in 1832 to the case of a deranged pensioner from Longford who committed a 'horrible murder'; on his wife. Suffering since Christmas, the cause of his madness was not made clear in the report in the *Limerick Evening Mail* though a detailed description of his actions was included: he 'nearly severed the head from the body with a butcher's knife and stabbed her in several parts of the body'.<sup>64</sup> Because of

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<sup>62</sup> Terms used included 'brute, animal, depraved, disgusting, extinguished reason, evil, monster, frenzied, senseless, debauched, sinful, unnatural'; *Patriot*, 17, 20 July 1824, *Limerick Chronicle* 27 July 1824, *Limerick Evening Post*, 22 July 1824, *Dublin Correspondent*, 20 July 1824 *Freemans Journal* 18 July 1824, *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16 July 1824. Recently, this subject has been thoughtfully addressed in an article limited to Lincoln, England: John Tulloch, 'The Privatising of Pain: Lincoln newspapers, "mediated publicness" and the end of public execution', *Journalism Studies*, 7 (2006), pp. 437-451.

<sup>63</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 Feb 1827.

<sup>64</sup> *Limerick Evening Mail*, 27 January 1832.

the location, a murder in a lunatic asylum was always newsworthy. Already classified as insane, the madness of the murderer did not need explaining, so that full attention could be given in the report to the sensational action and less significant details of the crime. The *Limerick Chronicle* reported that a Mr Bell murdered his keeper Mr Bean of Battersea by stabbing him in the chest 'in so dreadful a manner as to let out part of his entrails'.<sup>65</sup>

These sensational titbits usually discussed the lower classes or distant events, and rarely took more than a few lines within the provincial news section of the papers in Limerick. The involvement of a prominent individual in a murder (as either perpetrator or victim), and the carrying out of the murder in a time of public excitement could, however lead to more detailed reporting. This was the case with the 1812 assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval by John Bellingham. Perceval had been an enemy of the Irish press industry but his murder meant his rank in society outweighed what the Irish press considered as his political transgressions. In fact, Perceval's murder was deemed by the *Limerick Evening Post* to be such an excessively 'melancholy subject' that the editor and printer John Geary commented within the editorial section of his newspaper that 'the misfortune of the man blots out the errors of the Minister, while we lament his misfortune, we forgive his errors [and] we consign them to the deep oblivion of the grave.' Reports of the Prime Minister's assassination entirely occupied the space of the *Limerick Evening Post* and the other local newspapers, the *Limerick Chronicle* and the *Limerick General Advertiser*, the alleged insanity of the assassin playing a major part in the accounts.<sup>66</sup> Within a week of Geary's editorial commentary, Perceval's assassin had been named as John Bellingham, and the *Limerick Evening Post's* hypothesis regarding his mental state had been confirmed – something which, significantly, was a source of

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<sup>65</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 April 1792. What was most significant about this crime, according to the *Chronicle*, was that Bell, 'the lunatic' was entitled to £200,000 upon recovery.

<sup>66</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 18 May 1812. Initially the *Limerick Evening Post* did not know for definite whether 'the horrid perpetrator were really insane' but presumed that he had to be so as they had received word that he had for some time previous 'been confined in a receptacle for lunatics'. Infanticide, a primarily female crime, though outside the realms of understanding of polite society, was such a serious breach of the moral code that capital punishment was viewed as justifiable and deserved, as much by the perpetrator as by the wider public. Before the establishment of a system of asylums, the press reports suggest that a woman who killed her child was unlikely to defend her actions on the grounds of having been insane at the time of the killing. In 1815 a female servant of the Duke of Beaufort was reported in the Limerick press to have slit the throat of 'a male child' in Reigate. The *Limerick General Advertiser* reported that upon discovery of the dead child the female murderer exclaimed 'let me die or I shall be hanged'. *Limerick General Advertiser*, 10 September 1818.

relief since it indicated that the murder was the work of an individual rather than being a 'precursorship [sic] to revolutionary storm that...must, at first blush, have brought to mind all the frights and horrors of the French revolution'.<sup>67</sup> The madness of individuals was preferable to the political madness of revolutionaries.

A similar combination of public excitement and the involvement of a prominent individual accounted for the press attention given, two decades after Percival's murder, to the killing of a three year old girl, Catherine Sinnott by the Roman Catholic priest, John Carroll, in Wexford in 1824. In July of that year, Carroll was placed at the bar on a charge of murdering the young girl. The trial was covered in all the major Irish national and provincial newspapers and was reported and commented upon in many of the major London newspapers.<sup>68</sup> This alleged murder of the young girl by the priest (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) provided an opportunity for sectarian exchanges in which terms like 'delusions', 'bigotry', 'infatuation' and 'fanaticism' were mixed with references to 'mania' and 'derangement', reflecting and enforcing the prevailing belief that excess (whether religious, political or otherwise) was closely linked with madness.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time, the labelling of a murderer as a criminal lunatic could remove the responsibility for a crime from an individual since it could be introduced as a mitigating factor in relation to the perpetration of the crime.<sup>70</sup> In March 1825 John Slattery, of Attyflin, Co. Limerick, was acquitted of murdering Michael Bainbrid once 'the insanity of the unfortunate man was clearly established'.<sup>71</sup> The relationship between madness and murder began to raise questions as to the use of a plea of insanity as a way of avoiding capital punishment.<sup>72</sup> Vaughan has pointed out that the Irish registrar general believed that juries used insanity as a means of evading a verdict in capital cases: 'in his comments...he ascribed the large number of convictions for "lesser offences" [including insanity] in murder cases "to a very strong feeling against capital

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<sup>67</sup> *Limerick Evening Post*, 24 May 1812.

<sup>68</sup> *Times*, 20 July 1824; *Morning Register*, 21 July 1824; *Dublin Evening Post* July 17, 29, August 7 1824; *Dublin Correspondent*, 20, 22 July, August 7 1824; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16, 19 July 1824.

<sup>69</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16 July 1824; *Patriot*, 17, 20 July, 10 August 1824.

<sup>70</sup> Pauline Prior, 'Roasting a man alive: the case of Mary Reilly, criminal lunatic', *Eire-Ireland*, 41: 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2006), pp 169-91.

<sup>71</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March 1825.

<sup>72</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 February 1826.

punishment”.<sup>73</sup> These legal issues involved in prosecuting a lunatic for murder were not, however, debated in the Limerick until the further evolution in the laws in 1838 and into the 1840s and even then usually only in relation to high profile murders.<sup>74</sup> Before 1800 the verdict in such cases had been unequivocally ‘not guilty’ and the accused lunatic had been allowed to walk free, completely acquitted of the crime. This changed in 1800 following the attack of James Hadfield on George III when the verdict was modified to read ‘not guilty on the grounds of insanity’. Hadfield’s case and the resulting legislation created a new category of offenders, the criminal lunatic.<sup>75</sup> While Hadfield’s trial was reported in the Limerick press, it appears from the surviving newspapers that no notice was taken of the passing of the Act. Moreover, it becomes abundantly clear from Limerick and other Irish newspapers that the initial changes in the legislation in 1800 failed to set a legal precedent in Ireland and in many cases the categorization of a criminal as insane was at the whim of the judge who presided, his charge to the jury and the circumstances of individual cases.<sup>76</sup> These inconsistencies lasted long into the nineteenth century, even after the tightening of the laws that had occurred in 1838 was finally subjected to some detailed discussion in the provincial and national press in the 1840s.<sup>77</sup> As the categories of insanity broadened to include what was described as temporary insanity, the law as it applied to insane murderers was no longer seen as adequate.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, although insanity could excuse or explain the murderous

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<sup>73</sup> *Judicial Statistics (Ireland), 1871*, p. 26 [C674], HC 1872, lxx, 260, as cited in Vaughan *Murder Trials* p. 282. Limerick-man Hugh Massey was seen to have escaped stricter punishment when he was confined to an asylum at Glanmire for fabricating a murder and an ‘outrage’ in 1827.

<sup>74</sup> For discussions of the Dangerous Lunatics Act of 1838 see Finnane, *Insanity*, pp. 90-91; Cox, *Negotiating*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Moran, ‘The origin of insanity as a special verdict: the trial for treason of James Hadfield (1800)’, *Law & Society Review* (Blackwell Publishing), 19 (3), pp 487–19.

The 1800 act applied only to persons tried for murder, treason and felony. It allowed the court to order such persons to ‘be kept in strict custody, in such place and manner as to the court should see fit, until his majesty’s pleasure be known’. The act had not directed where these criminal lunatics would be housed or how (if at all), they might be released. In essence the 1800 act amounted to a life sentence that was either spent in a county goal or a lunatic asylum. It was the first evidence of the clear need for a new type of institution; Jonathan Andrews et al, *The history of Bethlem* (London, 2013), p. 404.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Moran ‘The modern foundation of the insanity defence: the cases of James Hadfield (1800), and Daniel McNaughten (1843)’, *Annals of the American academy of political and social science*, Vol. 477 (Jan., 1985), p. 37.

<sup>77</sup> Prior, ‘Gender’, in *Eire-Ireland* pp 268-298; *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 March 1843, *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 April 1843, *Nenagh Guardian*, 4 June 1845.

<sup>78</sup> Moran ‘The modern foundation of the insanity defense’, p. 32. A similar development occurred in the case of suicide discussed earlier. Temporary insanity seemed to serve as a way to correct a failure of the law to address some moral or social complexity, for instance suicide that eluded redress through the legal

actions of an individual, feigning madness was seen as allowing the perpetrator to escape the penalties of the law.<sup>79</sup>

The prospect of a sane and evil murderer escaping prosecution and punishment by pretending to be mad terrified the press commentators and officials alike. Hopkin and Bunney's recent study of the press reporting on the seven-time murdering lunatic Captain Stewart in 1828 illustrates this.<sup>80</sup> In a Limerick context, the *Chronicle* unhesitatingly proclaimed Stewart a lunatic, judging his appearance and behaviour as clearly proving his madness. However, when a tragedy involving murder and cannibalism happened in the sea off Newfoundland in December 1835 on board the Limerick-registered ship, the *Francis Spaight*, the local papers were adamant that insanity was not the cause.<sup>81</sup> Following the near destruction of the ship during a storm, a young cabin boy and two other crew-members had been eaten by the surviving crew members to stave off starvation. The remaining crew consisting of the captain and ten men were put on trial for murder but were eventually acquitted. During the course of the trials the Dublin press discussed the possibility that the killing had been committed while the crew were temporarily insane as during the trial the members of the crew had alluded to the derangement of their fellow crew members. This was taken as the explanation of 'their falling victim to the necessity'. A year after the trial, one of the survivors, John Palmer, published his account of what had occurred as a reaction to the negative press coverage following his emigration to Boston. The local Limerick newspapers, however, had centred on the necessity that drove the survivors' actions and on the heroism of the victims rather than on the madness of the actions.<sup>82</sup>

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system. It was in essence 'the perfect defense'; Russell D. Covey, 'Criminal madness: Cultural Iconography and Insanity' in *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 61, No. 6, 2009, pp. 1375-1376.

<sup>79</sup> Neil S. Kaye, 'Feigned Insanity in Nineteenth Century America Legal Cases' in *Behavioural Sciences & the Law*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 1990), pp 3-26.

<sup>80</sup> Alannah Hopkin and Kathy Bunney, *The ship of seven murders, a true story of madness and murder* (Cork, 2010), pp 138-140, 180-181.

<sup>81</sup> John Palmer, 'Awful shipwreck: the Francis Spaight 1836', in Rainer K. Baehre (ed.), *Outrageous Seas: shipwreck and survival in the waves off Newfoundland 1583-1893* (Ottawa, 1999), pp 264-265.

<sup>82</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 15 December 1835, *Freeman's Journal*, 11 January 1836; *The Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, Wednesday, 13 January, 1836. Within an account of the events written by Jack London and published some 76 years later in 1911 it was postulated that maniacal laughter had greeted the rescue boat as it hauled alongside the *Francis Spaight* and the survivors clambered on board; "'The Francis Spaight", a true tale retold' in: *When God Laughs & Other Stories* (London, 1911); for a contemporary commentary and account of the events on board see John Palmer, *Awful shipwreck: an*

Less than a decade after the *Francis Spaight* case, the issue of insanity as a mitigating factor in murder came up in parliament following the killing of Edward Drummond in late January 1843. Drummond, the then private secretary of Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, was murdered by Daniel M’Naghten. Five questions relating to crimes committed by individuals with delusions were put to the twelve judges of the Court of Common Pleas. The political climate at the time of M’Naghten was stormy and the queen had recently been the object of an assassination attempt for which the failed assassin had been acquitted on grounds of insanity. The political nature of M’Naghten’s crime seemed to exert the primary influence on the outcome of the trial more than any specific legal or medical arguments.<sup>83</sup> The answer to one of the questions became enshrined in law as the M’Naghten Rules and stated: ‘to establish a defence on the ground of insanity it must be clearly proved, that, at the time of committing the act, the party accused was labouring under such a defect of reason from disease of the mind, as not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing, or if he did know it, that he did not know that what he was doing was wrong’.<sup>84</sup> When the test set out by the rules are satisfied, the accused may be adjudged ‘not guilty by reason of insanity’ and the sentence may be a mandatory or discretionary (but usually indeterminate) period of treatment in a secure hospital facility, or otherwise at the discretion of the court instead of an acquittal. M’Naghten himself would have been found guilty if they had been applied at his trial. Moran has argued that the insanity defence was forever altered and following M’Naghten’s trial became a powerful mechanism to punish and deter the mad, whom may otherwise have been beyond the reach of the criminal law.<sup>85</sup> However, the categorisation of a murderer as insane was still deemed to entitle that person to some form of legal protection, and the provincial press supported this approach. In March 1843, the *Limerick Chronicle* gave considerable prominence to the report that the Galway MP, Sir Valentine Blake, had forwarded a motion in the House of Commons to abolish the plea of insanity in a case of murder or attempted murder unless the

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*affecting narrative of the unparalleled sufferings of the crew of the ship Francis Spaight, which foundered on her passage from St. John's N.B. to Limerick, in November last ... were relieved by the Brig Angeronia, Capt. Gillard, on her passage from Newfoundland to Teignmouth, communicated for the press by one of her survivors, John Palmer* (Boston, 1837).

<sup>83</sup> Moran, ‘The modern foundation of the insanity defense’, p. 41.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The House of Lords and the Judges’ ‘Rules’ (1843), reprinted in DJ West and A Walk (eds.), *Daniel M’Naghten: his trial and the aftermath* (London, 1977), pp. 74-81.

<sup>85</sup> Moran, ‘The modern foundation of the insanity defense’, p. 42

perpetrator was ‘a known and reputed maniac’. This motion, according to the *Chronicle*, ‘fell to the ground in the House for want of a seconder!’ The paper, in accordance with its usual attitude to legislation, made no comment but its inclusion of the issue showed that it was deemed worthy of publication.<sup>86</sup>

The Limerick newspaper-reading public were kept abreast of the M’Naghten case from the start. Changes in legislation that occurred as a result of this significant case received more coverage in the Irish press than the more influential Act of 1838. As M’Naghten was a native of Glasgow, the *Limerick Chronicle* took its reports of this sensational event ‘from the Glasgow papers’ which were convinced that M’Naghten was insane and gave a detailed account of his previous eccentric behaviour to confirm his insanity.<sup>87</sup> The legal wrangling involved in the insanity defence during the M’Naghten case was given prominence in the London *Times*, and was picked up and reprinted by the provincial press. The main article, reprinted in the *Limerick Chronicle*, argued that ‘highly curious as the phenomenon may be in a medical point of view it [was] but poor consolation to reflect that a fellow man has been prematurely cut off from his duties and enjoyments of a well spent life by the unsuspected assassin who laboured under a morbid delusion of which murder was the climax’.<sup>88</sup>

Nonetheless, although the insanity defence became harder to use after the assassination of Drummond, understanding of what the M’Naghten judgement involved was limited. There was relatively little commentary or public debate in the provincial press regarding the judgement, except for the isolated comment by one correspondent to the *Nenagh Guardian* that the assassin had ‘escaped with impunity’.<sup>89</sup> Local magistrates and courts actually found it necessary to point out the changes that had

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<sup>86</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 March 1843; *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 7 March 1843, vol. 67, c.424:

Sir V. Blake rose, pursuant to notice to move for leave to bring in a bill to abolish the plea of insanity in cases of murder, or attempts to murder, except where it can be proved that the person accused was publicly known and reputed to be a maniac, and not afflicted by partial insanity only; and to ask the House to suspend the standing orders, in order to accelerate the progress of the bill. He wished to know from the right hon. Gentleman opposite if her Majesty’s Government intended to propose anything of that sort. It was of course quite right to be cautious: but it should at the same time be remembered that delays were dangerous.

The hon. Member not finding a seconder, the motion dropped. House adjourned.

<sup>87</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 February 1843.

<sup>88</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 April 1844.

<sup>89</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 18 March 1843.

occurred.<sup>90</sup> A year later, there seems to have been a little more attention paid to the judgement though sometimes the interpretations, as relayed in the Irish provincial press, were inaccurate: the *Nenagh Guardian* included a skewed version of the crime statistics in Ireland for 1844, noting that of the 11,406 acquittals in the courts only a tiny number of twenty-three (0.2 per cent) were acquitted on the grounds of insanity.<sup>91</sup> Here the newspaper included all types of criminal activity rather than murder alone, but the inclusion of the report, inaccurate though it was, does show how the provincial press and its readers were becoming more aware of changing attitudes to the law on insanity in relation to murder.

However, the growing public awareness of these changes comes across in the case in July 1847 of John O'Grady who was brought before the Limerick Assizes charged with murdering his wife (who was expecting twins) and his servant maid in November 1846. The case excited extraordinary interest in the Limerick newspapers and in those of neighbouring counties. This, according to the *Limerick Chronicle* was 'on account of the responsibility of the party, his excellent character and the question of insanity involved'.<sup>92</sup> The defence lawyer, Mr Coppinger, objected to the charges of murder against O'Grady on the grounds of 'his not being of sound mind', his objection being 'founded upon an act of parliament'. When the medical officer of the Limerick goal, Dr Joseph Parker, declared that he did not believe O'Grady to be insane, but to be 'feigning

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<sup>90</sup> The M'Naghten rules (pronounced, and sometimes spelled, as above, as M'naghten were a reaction to the acquittal of Daniel M'Naghten. They arise from the attempted assassination of the British Prime Minister, Robert Peel, in 1843 by Daniel M'Naghten. In fact, M'Naghten fired a pistol at the back of Peel's secretary, Edward Drummond, who died five days later. The House of Lords asked a panel of judges, presided over by Sir Nicolas Conyngham Tindal, chief justice of the common pleas, a series of hypothetical questions about the defense of insanity. The principles expounded by this panel have come to be known as the *M'Naghten* Rules, even though they have only gained any status by usage in the common law and M'Naghten himself would have been found guilty if they had been applied to his trial. The rules so formulated as M'Naghten's Case 1843 have been a standard test for criminal liability in relation to mentally disordered defendants in common law jurisdictions ever since, with some minor adjustments.

<sup>91</sup> *Nenagh Guardian* 14 March 1844.

<sup>92</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 July 1847. When cross-examined the defending council put it to Parker that when it came to the recognising a madman by way of smell that 'doctors sometimes differ' on the validity of this method of diagnosis. Parker drew laughter from the court with the rebuke 'and so do lawyers too'. Dr Russell, a member of a prominent local family, dismissed Parker as 'merely an apothecary in the infirmary' (illustrating the negative perceptions and levels of status popularly held of both professions in one exchange). Further witnesses included Dr Peppard, physician and proprietor of the private Bushy Park Asylum in Co. Limerick and Samuel Bennett from Bruff, who 'knew the prisoner and family and heard he went by the name 'Mad-Tom'. After little deliberation the jury 'immediately' found that O'Grady was 'now at the time of arraignment, insane'.

madness', he created a 'sensation' in court. Parker's argument was that 'there is an odour particular to a madman' and he had 'never smelled it from him'. After little deliberation the jury 'immediately' found that O'Grady was 'now at the time of arraignment, insane', but there was a lack of clarity on the occasion regarding the legislation, so much so that in order to explain this verdict the court felt it was necessary to read the act of parliament that authorised the keeping of the prisoner in custody despite his insanity.<sup>93</sup>

Following the Dangerous Lunatic Act of 1838 and the M'Naghten case in 1843, escaping capital punishment through a plea of insanity no longer involved the accused walking free. As Prior put it, after 1838 'a successful insanity defence was regarded as a positive outcome even though it could lead to an indefinite sentence', while Moran shows how the legal changes brought about in 1843, though a positive development for murderers, were not as positive for the mad. The insanity defence was no longer a form of protection for the insane but had become in essence a mechanism to punish and deter pleas of insanity within cases of murder.<sup>94</sup> This clarification was available in Joseph Gabbett's 1843 *Treatise on criminal law*, printed in Dublin, and sold in Limerick. This work covered the tightening up of the law, explaining how a verdict indicating the insanity of the killer at the time of the murder would almost certainly lead to confinement, irrespective of whether the accused was convicted or acquitted, and prisoners committed for a criminal trial, even if they were not eventually prosecuted, could be confined.<sup>95</sup> But that the situation was still not widely understood is suggested by the *Limerick Chronicle's* attempt to clarify the legal situation by publishing an addendum to its report on O'Grady's trial:

The effect of the present verdict is merely to postpone the trial of the prisoner as being now insane. Should he recover from insanity he may be tried for the murder and the question as to whether he was insane at the time of the commission of the act will arise. In any case he is never likely to

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<sup>93</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 25, 29 July 1847; *Nenagh Guardian*, 24 July 1847.

<sup>94</sup> Pauline Prior, *Gender* pp 33,36, 278.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph Gabbett 'A treatise on criminal law', 2 vols. (Dublin 1843), ii, pp.516-17, as cited in W.E. Vaughan, *Murder trials in Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p.281. ; 'if any person charged with an offense shall be brought before the court to be discharged for want of prosecution and such a person shall appear to be insane it shall be lawful for such a court to order such person to be kept in strict custody'.

be set at large, for if he should be tried and committed upon the plea of insanity, he would then be imprisoned for life in an asylum as a dangerous lunatic'.<sup>96</sup>

O'Grady was indeed tried for the murder on 20 March 1850 and was capitally convicted, though intriguingly the local papers made comment on the judgement and no publicity was given to his case until ten days later.<sup>97</sup> Debates about his mental state had reached an impasse but had such a bearing on the case that within a week of his conviction it was decided by the Lord Lieutenant that the best means of dealing with him was to change his sentence to 'transportation for the term of his natural life'. When told that his life would be spared he apparently 'evinced no apparent gratification at escaping an ignominious death on the scaffold', an illustration according to the *Ballina Chronicle* of his 'weak state of mind'.<sup>98</sup>

Prior, using the convict and medical records of the criminally insane confined in the Central Criminal Lunatic Asylum opened in 1850, has suggested that in the later nineteenth century murder prompted by insane jealousy was almost exclusively a male defence and that this was used successfully by men who killed women but rarely by women who killed men.<sup>99</sup> An analysis of the pre-famine Limerick newspapers, however, suggests that this pattern was not universal.<sup>100</sup> There certainly were cases of murder prompted by male jealousy: the *Limerick Journal* reported in early 1791 on the case of Thomas Gallagher from Waterford who, in 'a fit of lunacy and jealousy, resolved to murder his wife, which he enforced [sic] by striking her a most violent blow of a hatchet on her head'.<sup>101</sup> But an investigation of the pre-famine Limerick press suggests that the taking of life as a consequence of jealousy was common to both sexes. The major difference was that jealous men mainly murdered their former lovers, whereas jealous women mainly killed themselves. In Limerick in the years between the passing of the 1843 legislation and immediately prior to the opening of the asylum, the *Limerick Examiner* discussed the 'murder of a jealous husband. The local and un-named murderer

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<sup>96</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 July 1847. Reprinted in *Nenagh Guardian*, 24 July 1847.

<sup>97</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 March 1850.

<sup>98</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 March 1850; *Ballina Chronicle* 3 April 1850.

<sup>99</sup> Pauline Prior, *Madness and murder*, pp.268, 294-296.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, p. 286.

<sup>101</sup> *Limerick Journal*, 10 February 1791.

suspected the fidelity of his wife and upon returning home from work one afternoon he 'found too truly the realization of his wife's dishonour'. He discovered his wife in bed with another man, named only as Walsh. According to the *Limerick Examiner*, 'with the fury of a lion and in a moment of temporary insanity he seized a spade handle and struck Walsh a blow that killed him on the spot'. The newspaper theorised, prior to any formal legal proceedings, that this was the consequence of 'insanity, caused by jealousy'.<sup>102</sup>

Deviant actions that violated and exceeded the social norms were principally associated with madness in newspaper reports in Limerick. It was this category of reports involving madness that was given the most column inches. Religious madness could violate social norms yet, similarly to a jealous murder, neither gender was more likely to suffer from religious madness. As the next chapter will suggest, it was the religion more so than the individual that was mad.

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<sup>102</sup> *Limerick Examiner*, 12 July 1844.

## CHAPTER 4: Religion and insanity

Though religion was believed to be the origin of some of the extreme cases of lunacy, surprisingly the interplay between religion and insanity did not play a major role in newspaper reporting in early nineteenth century Limerick. If anything, representations of religious enthusiasms within the press illustrated the mixed attitudes towards the relationship between religion and mental disorders as identified within medical circles by Cox.<sup>1</sup> This was in marked contrast to elsewhere, particularly America, where the links between religion and monomania formed the basis of many reports. Scholars have argued that nineteenth-century medical 'experts' in America, England and Ireland agreed that excessive religious experiences or enthusiasm produced monomania while it was also argued that religion could assist in the treatment of patients especially during convalescence.

The most comprehensive dissertation on religious excitement was *Observations on the Influence of Religion upon the Health and Physical Welfare of Mankind*, published in 1835 by Amariah Brigham, one of the most learned and progressive physicians of his day, and founding editor of the first psychiatric journal in the United States. Although Brigham criticized Catholic practice, his main emphasis was on Spiritualism, Millerism and Mormonism. In 1841, after a visit to thirteen European asylums, the leading American psychiatrist Pliny Earle contended that religious excitement was a distinctively American cause of insanity. He noted that none of 1,557 cases admitted to the Asylum at Charenton near Paris were attributed to religious excitement, compared with fifty-three of the 678 cases treated at the Massachusetts state hospital.<sup>2</sup> He suggested that the more lively and widespread religious debates in the United States promoted insanity there, while a separation of the French into obediently superstitious 'lower orders' and self-assured and secularised 'higher orders' left no one 'prey there to private indulgence

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<sup>1</sup> McGoff-McCann, *Melancholy madness*, p. 132; Cox, *Negotiating insanity*, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny Earle, *A visit to thirteen asylums for the insane in Europe: to which are added a brief notice of similar institutions in transatlantic countries and in the United States, and an essay on the causes, duration, termination and moral treatment of insanity, with copious statistics* (Philadelphia, 1841), p. 119.

in religious obsessions'.<sup>3</sup> The *New York Herald* in April 1845 discussed religious excitement as a cause of insanity.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, religion was not a major influence on representations of the mad and discourse on madness in the pre-famine Irish newspapers. Cox has recognised the validity of Porter's arguments regarding religion and madness within the Irish context noting that by the early nineteenth century 'the belief that being out of one's mind had its place within Christian values as potentially positive phase of spirituality was losing popularity.'<sup>5</sup> Yet, usually madness was reported in combination with behaviours that were deemed to be outside both accepted religious and cultural norms of society, and was used to explain abnormal actions. Representations of the mad were usually not religiously biased unless the religious doctrine that was followed, or the conduct done in the name of that doctrine, was abnormal or fanatical. Extreme religious beliefs were represented as causing excessive mental distress.

This was the case in newspaper treatment of self-proclaimed prophets, disaffected preachers, and followers of unfamiliar religions. Entertainment value, distance, class interests and rationalization of deviant and excessive actions were much more influential in shaping newspaper representations of the mad and this was particularly true in the case of what could be termed the 'religious' mad. However, the approach and emphasis changed in times of high sectarian tension, as with the acceleration of mass political participation among the catholic peasantry in the 1820s, a politicisation that was accelerated when O'Connell's Catholic Association drew in the lower levels of the population by introducing the penny membership fee in 1824.<sup>6</sup> This was a typical situation where mass participation in religion, protest or politics could produce mass hysteria.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the press tended to use the terminology of madness

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 120; However, American psychiatric thought was an extension of British and French doctrines, and the theory of religious insanity eventually took firm root in all three nations in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Herald*, 20 April 1845.

<sup>5</sup> Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p. 268 quoted in Cox, *Negotiating insanity*, p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1998) p. 18; Patrick M. Geoghegan *King Dan: the rise of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1829* (Dublin, 2011), pp. 205-206; D.G. Boyce *Nineteenth-Century Ireland (New Gill History of Ireland 5)*, (Dublin, 2005), p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular delusions and the madness of crowds - Vol. I* (London, 1852), p. viii; Gustav Le Bon, *The crowd: a study of the popular mind* (London, 1895) p 5; Peter Jupp and Eoin

to describe such mass participation, as when involvement in the White Boys, an agrarian protest movement originating in the eighteenth century, was recalled by the *Limerick Chronicle* as the 'madness of misguided people'.<sup>8</sup>

Madness associated with religion was (as in the press depiction of foreign and unknown lunatics) presented as a proof of character inferiority or deficiency, especially in an individual whose politics were opposed by the reporting newspaper, with little consideration of causes or treatment of the madness. In this association of madness with politics, a geographical difference in newspaper reporting is apparent. The metropolitan newspapers of Dublin had more freedom to comment on political issues than did their Limerick counterparts and 'used' religious madness more frequently and easily as a political weapon than did their provincial counterparts in Limerick.<sup>9</sup>

Where lunacy and religion were linked in the early nineteenth century press, the religious groups identified as bordering on the insane were usually non-conformist, those fringe religious movements that tended to appear from time to time among the non-elite. Both newspaper editors and contributors to the newspapers condemned as abnormal (and mad) the meetings, revivalism and fanaticism of such movements, regardless of the gender of the participants. After the self-proclaimed prophetess Joanna Southcott, whose preaching had generated a wave of popular hysteria in Britain, died in December 1814 her body was dissected during the autopsy that followed in January 1815. The *Limerick General Advertiser* included a detailed description of the dissection so readers would be aware that the 'deluded wretched enthusiast' was not pregnant with the messiah and was not going to revive after four days as she had proclaimed to her followers in the weeks prior to her death. She had in fact died as a result of a considerable quantity of 'fat stones' found in the gall bladder, and the verdict was that

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Magennis, *Crowds in Ireland, C.1720-1920*, (London, 2000) pp. 1-3; Jaap van Ginneken, *Crowds, psychology, and politics, 1871-1899*, (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 130.

<sup>8</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 February 1832.

<sup>9</sup> Inglis, *Freedom*, pp 72-76. The local newspapers of Limerick were so closely aligned with the political elite that little freedom to comment or indeed a desire to comment on behalf of the proprietors of the newspapers was evident until the late 1820s and into the 1830s.

she had died from natural causes. According to the newspaper report, happily, this was enough to send her followers skulking away glad 'to escape the view of the populace'.<sup>10</sup>

The link between lunacy and religious enthusiasm was not, however, implied in the accounts of those who, irrespective of their religious extremism, remained within the mainstream Protestant church.<sup>11</sup> This was clear in the newspaper reaction to Mark Hollis, the Dublin protestant shoeblick who in 1815 claimed to be 'Christ's own anointed'. Hollis was brought before the parish officers at Marlborough-street police station, accused of 'preaching a mischievous doctrine', and had, according to reports in the Limerick press, 'greatly prejudiced ignorant persons against the true tenets of the established church' with his preaching.<sup>12</sup> But because he was a licensed preacher of the Established Church, Hollis' mental capabilities (unlike those of Southcott) were never questioned, though the magistrates did warn him that he would end up in a house of correction if he was found offending in a like manner again. This link between madness and the enthusiasm of minority religious groups was also indicated in the evolving medical literature of the early nineteenth century. By the time William Saunders Hallaran published the second edition of his Irish textbook on insanity in 1818 he was able to state that among the two main religious denominations in Ireland, Catholics and the Established Church, 'it would be unjust to refer...to the influence of religious terror any more than to the influence of other common causes' for insanity.<sup>13</sup> Within the Cork lunatic asylum that he oversaw there was a ten to one ratio of Catholic to Protestant patients but none of the Catholics admitted were described as suffering from religious madness upon admission, whereas it was noticeable that 'several' of the protestant admissions were 'dissenters' from the established religion.<sup>14</sup>

In the atmosphere of heightened religious tension generated by the Second Reformation, the Pastorini prophecies, and the increasingly assertive movement for Catholic Emancipation, some events occurred that prompted the Protestant press to

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<sup>10</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 26 January 1815.

<sup>11</sup> John Cheyne, *Essays on Partial Derangement of the Mind in Supposed Connection with Religion* (Dublin, 1843) p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Limerick General Advertiser*, 22 October 1815.

<sup>13</sup> William Saunders Hallaran, *Practical* p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p. 32.

equate Catholicism with lunacy.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes an individual who converted from one creed to another was branded (by the denomination he had deserted) as insane. Such a case was given prominence in the Limerick papers in 1824 when a press debate unfolded in which the Roman Catholic Curate of Nenagh engaged with a local protestant apologist regarding the deathbed conversion of a local doctor, Thomas O'Meara.<sup>16</sup> The curate wanted the public to be aware that O'Meara had been in his senses and his letter stressed that 'was perfectly collected during his illness, and teach him to trace the cause not in the mental incapacity of the doctor but at his absolute volition to receive it at his own hands'. As in the case of previous and later cases involving alleged insanity, the evidence of doctors was considered vital in this case, and attached to Curran's letter were statements from three physicians, Pierce McKeogh, James Dempster and Neil Quin, confirming that the doctor had 'retained full use of his mental faculties'. These three physicians themselves wrote a joint letter to the editor of the *Limerick Chronicle* to point out that Dr O'Meara's complaint 'was not brain fever' and stressing the superior understanding that doctors had in this regard – claiming that the individual who claimed that insanity was involved in the conversion should have consulted them before they 'thrust his sickle into the medical and ventured before the public'.<sup>17</sup>

A further controversy involving religion and lunacy appeared in the provincial press two months after the O'Meara case. This involved the Wexford priest, Fr. John Carroll, who was charged with murdering Catherine Sinnott, a three year old girl.. The trial took place in Wexford and the first newspaper to report on the events was the *Wexford Herald*. This subject had been the only topic of conversation among all classes, according to the *Herald* who proclaimed with Swiftian panache that 'no circumstance has occurred in this country since the deplorable era of 1798 has occasioned in the public mind a sensation more intense than this "tale of a tub"'.<sup>18</sup> The killing of the child seems, in fact, not to have been premeditated, but to have been linked with a botched

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<sup>15</sup> James S. Donnelly Jr. 'Pastorini and Captain Rock, millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement 1821-24' in James S. Donnelly Jr. and Samuel Clarke, *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Wisconsin, 2003), pp. 102-142.

<sup>16</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 May 1824. The first letter appeared in the *Limerick Evening Post* on 27 April 1824, and was reprinted in the *Chronicle* on 28 April. It stated that Dr O'Meara had converted to the Catholic religion before dying and that the curate had administered the last sacraments to him.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16 July 1824. Swift's *Tale of the Tub*, printed in 1704, was a satire of religious excess. Swift had shown the troubles that arose from the links between politics and religion.

exorcism. Proclaiming a devil in the child he attacked and beat her and told the watching crowd that her crying was a sign of her 'possession'. He ordered a tub of water and salt and as the little girl lay bleeding in the bed he poured its contents over her. When turning the tub over upon her the edge caught her neck. This, the *Wexford Herald* asserted 'mercifully completed the tragedy'. Catherine Sinnott died from her injuries during the proceedings.<sup>19</sup>

The claim that Carroll was allegedly insane (either mentally or in terms of his religious fanaticism) was supported by some of his previous activities. He had earlier trampled on a man and two women whom he had also claimed were possessed of the devil.<sup>20</sup> In consequence Carroll's actions were attributed by the press to 'religious madness, the most afflicting disease of the human mind'.<sup>21</sup> This directly echoed Hallaran's assertion of six years previously that religious forms of madness were 'unfortunately the most obstinate...[and] least disposed to submit to necessary modes of treatment' and was 'particularly liable to returns of the complaint'.<sup>22</sup> Further echoing Hallaran's opinion, the *Patriot* asserted that religious madness was not just displayed among Catholics but was a 'universal attribute' of all religions'.<sup>23</sup>

The evidence of medical men, as in the later O'Grady case, was given a great deal of attention in court. Doctors Devereux and Renwick had been called during the trial and both had concurred on Carroll's state of mind. He was, they stated, undoubtedly in a

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<sup>19</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 17 July 1824; *Dublin Correspondent*, 20 July 1824; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16 July 1824.

<sup>20</sup> On 9 July Fr. Carroll first set out to visit Henry Neale, who was lying ill of apoplexy. He proclaimed him to be troubled with devils and 'jumped on him several times'. Turning to a woman, Peggy Dandy, who had fell to the ground in hysterics upon seeing the priest's treatment of the seriously ill Neale he trampled upon her in turn, breaking several of her ribs, 'proclaiming her to be full of devils'. According to first witness called at the coroner's inquest, W. Furlong, Carroll then walked over to where a woman of the name of Moran was lying speechless on the ground. He then stamped his foot twice and said 'Begone!' after which he spat on her. He then threw himself onto his back on the ground and rubbed his hand for some time against the gravel until it was cut and bleeding. After reciting some words in Latin Fr Carroll took off down the road towards the Sinnotts, followed by a great number of the three hundred that had by now gathered around him. By the time Furlong managed to squeeze himself into the crowded kitchen the priest had trapped Thomas Sinnott's daughter, Catherine, under a wooden tub, claiming she was possessed by demonic spirits. Carroll was standing on top of the bottom of the overturned tub and leaping and dancing about as he uttered various Latin exclamations and whistled a hornpipe, keeping time by tapping his foot on the tub, under which Catherine was trapped. She subsequently died during the proceedings, all the time watched by the gathered crowd that included not only Furlong but both of her parents. It was alleged that neither of them had attempted to stop Carroll.

<sup>21</sup> *Patriot*, 17 July 1824.

<sup>22</sup> Hallaran, *Practical* (1818), p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

high state of insanity, a conclusion reiterated particularly by the local press. But while the *Wexford Herald* showed some sympathy for the ‘unfortunate’ Carroll as he laboured under insanity, for other newspapers more distant from the event it was a chance to use the mad catholic priest to score political points.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, this was not the case within the Limerick press, which chose only to reprint the accounts of Carroll’s trial that appeared in the *Wexford Herald* without further comment. The Dublin newspapers were more prepared to represent the killing in a political and denominational light.<sup>25</sup>

The political point-scoring of newspapers in their reporting of the Carroll case was noticed by contemporary commentators. A pamphlet entitled *Report of the Trial of Rev John Carroll* published in Dublin in 1824 referred to the ‘monstrous contrarities’ and ‘contradictions’ reflected ‘the personal quarrels of the parties concerned’, the truth being moulded by ‘the mere *dictum* of an editor’.<sup>26</sup> This was an accurate assessment. The pamphlet in question was itself partisan, stressing the dangers of Catholic clerical power, and the peasantry’s belief in the miraculous nature of that power – a theme taken up in other pamphlet publications and many of the newspapers.<sup>27</sup> Straight away following the killing of the child, the *Dublin Evening Mail* claimed that this incident highlighted that the ‘influence of the priests [was] unbounded, absolute and omnipotent’, leading a gullible peasantry astray.<sup>28</sup> Blame lay squarely at the feet of the Catholic clergy, whose political power had both promoted, and been promoted by the expanding Catholic Association under the leadership of Daniel O’Connell.<sup>29</sup> The *Evening Mail* peppered its reports on Carroll’s killing of young Sinnott with advice to its readers to consider what would become of the minority protestant population, those whom the catholic clergy

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<sup>24</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 29 July, 7 August 1824; *Dublin Correspondent*, 22 July, 7 August 1824.

<sup>25</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 August 1824, *Limerick Evening Post*, 8 August 1824.

<sup>26</sup> Anon., *Report of the Trial of the Rev John Carroll, Roman Catholic Curate of Killinick, in the County of Wexford, and five of his parishioners, for Murder* (Dublin, 1824), p. vi.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*; Anon., *Fanaticism! Cruelty!! Bigotry!!! The particulars of the horrible murder of Catharine Sinnott, a child under four years of age, by the Rev. John Carroll, an Irish Catholic Priest, under pretence of performing a miracle, by casting devils out of the child, which took place at Killinick in the County of Wexford, on Friday, July 9, 1824* (London, 1824), p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 16 July 1824.

<sup>29</sup> S.J. Connolly ‘Mass politics and sectarian conflict 1823-30’ in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland Vol. V 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), p. 87. The priests had an influential role in the expanding Catholic Association. The constitution of the Catholic Association included the clergy as ex officio members, without the need to pay an annual subscription. When the scheme for the penny catholic rent was put forward in early 1824 Daniel O’Connell proposed that the local clergy be asked to supervise the scheme. Through this initiative the association was to finally get the formal backing of the clergy.

‘rancorously hate and with whom they openly profess there is “no faith to be kept” when they were in the possession of such powers and influence’ over the catholic peasantry.<sup>30</sup> The *Dublin Correspondent* was less subtle in its association of the events in Wexford with current political tensions, hoping that this fanatical instance would ‘teach the Roman Catholic Association to be more moderate in the course they [were] pursuing... [and] induce them to labour in the moral and mental improvement of their countrymen before they advocate for them the possession of political power’.<sup>31</sup> The newspaper claimed that nothing could presently more plainly exhibit the ‘state of the moral and mental degradation’ under which a great proportion of the population laboured than the occurrences in Wexford.<sup>32</sup> Carroll’s madness was the immediate explanation for the killing but the political significance of his actions was considered more dangerous as his religious ravings and ranting were seen as symptomatic of the Catholic Association’s threat to undermine the structures of society. Even other unrelated homicides were linked by the ultra-Protestant press with the killing of Sinnott. The *Dublin Evening Mail*, for example, linked the shooting of an Orangeman in Arklow on 12 July in the same year with the Wexford killing, claiming that ‘the pious work of exterminating the protestants is prosecuting with due alacrity’.<sup>33</sup>

The newspapers’ coverage of the murder of Catherine Sinnott created a ‘folk devil’ in the shape of Carroll, and generated (to use a term coined almost two centuries later) a ‘moral panic’ regarding the madness of the supporting Catholic peasant crowd.<sup>34</sup> Normally madness was not included in the category of a ‘moral panic’ as it was primarily constructed as an individual pathology. In the case of events at Ballymore, however, madness and mob activity were linked: the press had been shocked at the size of the crowd that gathered around Carroll and allowed him to continue on his mad religiously inspired spree of devastation. Press reports made it clear that the trusting peasantry were easily led due to their loyalty to the clergy. As Hallaran pointed out, ‘those of

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<sup>30</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 19 July 1824.

<sup>31</sup> *Dublin Correspondent*, 20 July 1824.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 19 July 1824.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of the concept of moral panics see Stanley Cohen *Folk Devils and moral panics: the creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1972). ‘Folk Devil’ is a term popularized by Cohen to describe an individual or group defined as a threat to society, its values and interests, who become the subject of a media-orchestrated moral panic.

ordinary knowledge are not calculated for the close investigation of doctrinal points'.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, religious difference was readily constructed as deviance, even lunacy, by a section of the press industry: the mad mob in Wexford was akin to the mad mob of the Catholic Association. The representations of the Wexford mob in the press made those present during Carroll's mad rampage bring to mind Earle's obediently superstitious French 'lower orders' .<sup>36</sup>

Two decades following the Carroll case, another case of reputed religion-linked madness became an item of news in the Irish newspaper press. This involved Marianne Nevill, an heiress, had her right to control over her property suspended in 1837 when her Jewish sympathies were deemed to reflect extreme religious enthusiasm and were interpreted as insanity. Interestingly, the case came to light again in November 2008 when the *Irish Independent* noted that an historical piece of Irish tapestry was due to go under the hammer in the London auction house of *Christies* within the next month. The one thousand inch long stitched scroll of the Gospel of St Luke in English and Italian had been created by Nevill whilst she was confined to her house as a lunatic in Dublin in 1846.<sup>37</sup> Nevill was, in her own word, 'stitched onto the start of this beautiful artwork' as a penalty for 'believing the Omnipotence of God and the restoration of Israel, according to the scriptures'. By the time the tapestry was completed she had been under constant supervision for nearly a decade, though she allowed during that time to look after orphans and teach them to embroider and she made the piece with the help of five orphans whom she supported.<sup>38</sup>

Known only for this wonderful piece of needlework, Marianne Nevill's life and story illustrate the attitudes to madness in Irish high society in the immediate pre-famine decades. Nevill was a fashionably educated Irish heiress, a member of the protestant ascendancy. Following the death of her father, Richard Nevill, in the early 1830s, she inherited property and land in Kildare, Wexford and Cork and in consequence had an

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<sup>35</sup> Hallaran, *Practical* (1818), p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Earle, *Visit*, p. 120.

<sup>37</sup> *Irish Independent*, 9 November 2008. The tapestry sold on 8 December 2008, exceeding the top-end of the estimated £4-6000, and reaching a hammer price of £6,250. Nevill had been confined to her house at 33 Rutland Street, Dublin.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *Narrative of seven years of religious persecution, including Miss Nevill's sufferings, and selections from her correspondence and proceedings*, p. 140.

annual income of around £2,500.<sup>39</sup> She was a prolific writer of pamphlets and letters, corresponding with powerful and respected people.

Sarah Wise's recent account of the 'inconvenient people' in Victorian England recalled the theories of two well-regarded British mad-doctors regarding religious monomania and women during the early nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> The previously mentioned John Conolly stated in a letter of 1849 that religious fanaticism was the most frequent cause of insanity in women of intellect. Such women, he argued, were 'easily induced to believe God speaks to them more directly than to others...they denounce their relatives and friends, write foolish or abusive letters...put their whole trust only in the vilest flatterers of their folly, to whom their property is willingly confided'.<sup>41</sup> Sir Alexander Morrison who in 1835 became physician to the Bethlehem Hospital, and three years later was appointed personal physician to Princess Charlotte, similarly asserted within a psychological textbook that a woman suffering from religious monomania 'conceives herself to be more than mortal, and is full of self-complacency, benevolence to those about her; she is, however thrown into a state of fury and agitation if her divinity be questioned.'<sup>42</sup> Indeed religious delusions and the classification of these as monomaniacal are deemed to have played a significant part in the emergence of this new discipline of madness.<sup>43</sup> Monomania had by the 1830s become an accepted classification within lunacy though its importance as a psychiatric diagnostic category was in decline from the mid-19th century.<sup>44</sup>

Nevill's case was considered by the contemporary press and by legal and medical men as indicative of such religious monomania. She had claimed to have had a vision of God in 1813, at around seventeen years of age, and regularly told visitors and officials of

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<sup>39</sup> This equates to between £60,000 (€100,000), in 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Wise, *Inconvenient people: Lunacy, liberty and the mad-doctors in Victorian England* (London, 2012), p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> John Conolly, *A remonstrance with the Lord Chief Baron touching the case Nottidge versus Ripley*, 1849

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Wise, *Inconvenient people* p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, bad and sad, a history of women and the mind doctors from 1800 to the present* (London, 2008), p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> Etienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: a treatise on insanity*, translated from the French with additions by E. K. Hunt, M.D. (Philadelphia 1845), pp 199-233; Beverley Robinson Morris, *A theory as to the proximate cause of insanity, together with some observations on the remote causes of the disease* (London, 1844), p. 4; German E. Berrios, *The history of mental symptoms: descriptive psychopathology since the nineteenth century* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp 426, 447, 453.

her plans to collect the Jews from all nations in Idumea south of Judea in order to convert them. She maintained she had been granted the land by Mahomet Ali Pasha of Egypt. Nevill was convinced that God had shown her that the way forward for Christianity was through the conversion of the Jews. In 1829 Nevill had published *A Letter, addressed to the Jews of Thessalonica, the shores of Greece and the Levant*.<sup>45</sup> In the same year she prepared a Hebrew translation of the Book of Common Prayer, intended for the use of Jews who wanted to convert to Christianity. After the publication of these works she was apparently defrauded out of significant sums of money by what the *Limerick Chronicle* described as 'designing imposters, who encouraged the fanaticism she was labouring under, and drew from her large sums of money, under pretence of building churches and cities in the Holy Lands for the wandering Israelites.'<sup>46</sup> The *Chronicle* seems to have taken its reports from the columns of Dublin papers, though precisely which papers is never stated.

Nevill's writings provide a rare insight into the attitude to insanity of an individual believed to be mad. Despite the problematic nature of memoir as a historical source, the Nevill writing does reflect the contemporary belief that financial mismanagement was evidence of insanity.<sup>47</sup> As her memoir points out, although her religious attitudes were eccentric enough to draw the charge of lunacy, the principal difficulty for Nevill arose not from her religious opinions, but from her apparent carelessness with her money. Her nephew, William, and her sister, Henrietta (who became Lady Geary upon marrying Sir William Geary of Limerick), claimed that Nevill's religiously motivated spending would destroy their future inheritance, and issued a writ *de lunatico Inquirendo* against her in July 1837.<sup>48</sup> The role of medical men in reaching a verdict of insanity was evident in Nevill's case. Affidavits, some signed by physicians that had apparently never even

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<sup>45</sup> Marianne Nevill, *A letter, addressed to the Jews of Thessalonica, the shores of Greece and the Levant. Published in English, for the use of the Jews in England and America* (Dublin 1829), pp 1-3. There is no evidence as to whether or not this publication was sold in Limerick.

<sup>46</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 January 1838.

<sup>47</sup> Maureen Murdock, *Unreliable Truth: on memoir and memory* (New York, 2003), p. 16; Porter, *Mind-forg'd manacles*, p. 229; Hallaran, *Practical observations*, p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> A writ issued to inquire into the state of a person's mind, whether it is sound or not. If not of sound mind, the person is called non compos, and is committed to proper guardians; John Shapland Stock. *A practical treatise on the law of non compos mentis, or persons of unsound mind* (New York, 1836),, p. 52.

attended to her and others that had (allegedly) sworn to charges of witchcraft against her, sealed her committal.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the ensuing investigation, Nevill was declared a lunatic in July 1837. She was deemed to have been suffering from religious monomania and incapable of handling her own affairs any longer.<sup>50</sup> Most of the information on Nevill's original commission comes from her own writings, and there is a surprising absence of any reference to this in the contemporary press, not only in provincial Limerick, but in Dublin also.

Among the numerous essays and ephemeral sources gathered in the Halliday collection in the Royal Irish Academy is included an eleven page pamphlet, *Hints upon insanity, especially monomania: by a person supposed insane*.<sup>51</sup> Apparently written in 'less than three hours' in July 1837 and dedicated to the Lord Chancellor, it was anonymously written but a poem on the last page indicates the author. The reader is told 'let those who read the following lines discover in them the name of the writer of this essay on insanity':

Most Beautiful with radiance bright  
All is illum'd with heavenly light  
Revolving with the orb of day;  
It charms me with its bright display,  
And bids me feel my Saviours' power;  
Now guides, directs, each trying hour,  
No fear can then disturb my breast  
Ever with Christ, with him's my rest.  
Nor Care, nor trouble can I feel,  
Increased [sic] joy is on the wheel;  
Vain are their efforts to destroy,  
In Christ secure, what can annoy,  
Let me for life, or death prepare,

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<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, *Narrative*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, *Speech of the Rt. Hon. Francis Blackburne, on behalf of Miss Nevill: In the court of Queen's Bench, on the 10th of January, 1838, and studiously suppressed in the published account of the trial* (Dublin, 1843), pp 65-66; Anonymous, *Narratives*, pp 5-8.

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous, *Hints upon insanity, especially monomania: by a person supposed insane* (Dublin, 1837). The pamphlet had been printed by J.D. Scott working from 70 Abbey-Street.

Leave, but O leave me to me Saviour's care.<sup>52</sup>

This piece is an acrostic name poem, a piece of writing in which the first letter of each line in the text spells out a word or a message, in this case, the secret author's name – Marianne Nevill.

Nevill had written this pamphlet immediately after the commission of July 1837 found her to be a lunatic suffering from monomania. Her story, gives an insight into elite attitudes to madness in the early nineteenth century – an insight that Alice Mauger has recently noted as missing from Irish studies on madness.<sup>53</sup> Her writing, moreover, as that of a certified lunatic, gives a rare account from within of madness in nineteenth century Ireland. In fact, Nevill's short work gives a more intimate insight into lunacy than do legal and medical works and contemporary newspaper treatment of the subject. Nevill's intention was to show what she saw as the inherent flaws in the classifying of monomania and insanity. Cleverly she related her arguments to issues with which she had to deal following her legal designation as a lunatic a month previously. Her work gives some insight into how madness was classified and categorised in early nineteenth century psychiatry. It shows monomania as a state of partial insanity conceived as a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sound mind.

In her pamphlet, Nevill addressed some of the issues raised by Esquirol (whom she cites in her work) and questioned the validity of the classificatory system surrounding the legal categorization of madness:

Mistakes in judging Monomania frequently occur from ignorance of things possible; assertion is not proof, and the facts have been stubborn thing and never to be reckoned as any subject *de Lunatico inquirendo*, otherwise every Philosopher who tried experiments would be brought as deranged, and of unsound mind, or at least Monomaniac because the public did not understand alkaline and acids.<sup>54</sup>

Accordingly she claimed that monomania needed to be judged by the possibility and practicality of a thing to be done and that this should be backed up by documentary

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Alice Mauger "Confinement of the higher orders", p. 281.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

evidence, and not by the power of the individuals who judge since 'they judge by a standard of their own knowledge, [and] they may give false judgement as in the case of Galileo and Columbus ... they pronounced them lunatics'.<sup>55</sup>

Nevill appealed against her classification as a lunatic and this appeal was heard at the court of Queen's Bench in January 1838. Her initial hearing had gone un-noticed and un-reported by the press. It was not until the hearing of the appeal that she began to gain some form of public exposure. Even then that was not due to the details of the case or those involved but, as the *Dublin Morning Register* made clear, because this 'was the first instance in the country where an appeal had been made from the decision of the Lord Chancellor to a jury of the country and a court of law.'<sup>56</sup> It was at this point that the Limerick press became interested, the *Limerick Chronicle* publishing a summarised account of the enquiry.<sup>57</sup>

Nevill's appeal failed and the jury found that she was a monomaniac and incapable of handling her own affairs. She was placed under house arrest to await her fate and to find out where and how she was to be confined and treated.<sup>58</sup> The initial

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<sup>55</sup> For understanding religious monomania she claimed that three things had to be considered: (a), Not to mistake errors in doctrine *for cases of Monomania*; (b), Not to consider a firm belief in the Omnipotence of God and the truth of the Holy Scriptures as Monomaniac; (c), Not to consider *conclusions rightly drawn from Scriptures proofs* of Monomania because they do not understand them.

<sup>56</sup> *Morning Register*, 15 January 1838.

<sup>57</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 January 1838; 'The extraordinary case of appeal from the verdict of a lunacy commission affecting Mary Anne Neville (sic),, daughter of the late Richard Neville Esq. of Furness, Kildare, after occupying the Court of the Queen's Bench for five days, was finally brought to an issue at an advanced hour on Saturday last, when the jury found for the Crown, in confirmation of the diseased state of mind of the unfortunate lady, who from being a religious enthusiast and inspired from heaven, as she said, to convert the Jews, and collect them from all nations in Idumea, had fallen into the hands of designing imposters, who encouraged the fanaticism she was labouring under, and drew from her large sums of money, under pretence of building churches and cities in the Holy Lands for the wandering Israelites. She had been allured to Liverpool and Bath, where her sister, Lady Geary, traced the unhappy lady, then under the influence of these persons, and brought her over to Dublin. She had been left by her father 700*l.* a year, and the interest of 8000*l.*, a great part of which was squandered in this manner. Mr Ohio west was to be her Bishop, and others were named as belonging to the missionary staff. Lieut. O'Malley, 88<sup>th</sup> Regt. was to conduct her colony to the recesses of Judea. A number of witnesses were examined for and against the validity of the commission. The Rev. Charles Minchin was asked about Mr West, who he said had passed himself as a Bishop in this country, and had deceived several persons but not him. The agent of the Neville [sic] property pronounced him at the trial to be an imposter, but the finding at all events has released this lady and her remaining fortune, from the grasp of a vile set of trading hypocrites'.

<sup>58</sup> Accounts of the initial moments and the subsequent years of her confinement following her failed appeal are available from two works published during the time she was under house arrest. *The Speech of the Rt. Hon. Francis Blackburne* was published in Dublin in 1843, by James Charles of 57 Mary-Street 'for

responses to the verdict by Nevill's friends illustrate the stigma, echoed in Goffmann's 'creation of a spoiled identity', that was inherent in the classification of an individual's condition as lunacy. This stigma existed irrespective of class background.<sup>59</sup> When one of Nevill's friends brought her the news of the commission's judgement, he clasped his hands and proclaimed – 'It's all over, you are condemned.' On hearing this melodramatic verdict Nevill initially thought she had been sentenced to death, such was the despair of her gathered friends and associates, some of whom were reduced to a 'hysterical state'. It took some ten minutes before she found out 'that the jury had *only made her a lunatic*.' According to a gentleman who visited her a few days later, and a spy for her sister, suicide was the only 'remedy' left open to her – all responses that were understandable in an era when confinement and care for lunacy meant the loss of control of one's finances and freedom of movement and speech.<sup>60</sup>

Nevill's case also sheds light on the class differences in the treatment of insanity. As she was wealthy and educated, she was never confined in an asylum, public or private, and instead was cared for at her home, a practice more commonly associated with the eighteenth century, i.e. before the establishment of the private and public asylums. Although the private asylums were aimed at the wealthier ranks of society, Nevill's sister and nephew decided that it was more beneficial to place her in the care of someone they knew would not question the lunacy judgement.<sup>61</sup>

Nevill's classification as insane due to her religious predispositions caused some repercussions in contemporary society. It is a curious fact, that shortly after she was

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the Friends of Miss Nevill'; *A Narrative of seven years of religious persecution* was printed by Joseph P. Colridge of Dublin in 1844. Both works were published anonymously.

<sup>59</sup>Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London, 1990). For Goffman the mad fall into the category of socially *abnormal*, and therefore in danger of being considered less than human. Whether ordinary people react by rejection, by over-hearty acceptance or by plain embarrassment, their main concern is with such an individual's deviance, not with the whole of his personality.

<sup>60</sup> *Narrative*, pp 7, 9.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid*, p. 16. Initially she was placed under the care of Miss Amy Roberts, daughter of Mr M.C. Roberts, a close associate of her sister and nephew. Amy Roberts had no medical qualifications or previous experience of dealing with the insane but was still allowed to supervise and care for Nevill. Unacquainted with the laws surrounding lunacy, Nevill accepted every restrictive measure imposed by her relatives' advisors, and Miss Roberts was able to proclaim she was her 'amiable keeper'. This arrangement lasted only a couple of weeks before the unfortunate Miss Nevill was introduced to Lady Barton in February 1838. Her future jailor is wonderfully described in *Narratives* as 'a great fat vulgar woman who boasted she was the *best whip* in England and the *best shot* and not unfrequently [sic] *groomed her own horse*'. *Narrative*, p. 17.

'condemned', a meeting of Established Church clergy was held at Grafton Street to consider whether there was a danger that they, too, might be proclaimed lunatics, should they preach the usual annual sermons for the conversion of the Jews.<sup>62</sup> It was agreed that delivering the sermons themselves might be inadvisable, but that they might get preachers from England or Scotland who would not be under the liabilities of the law of lunacy. This course was adopted and ran for several years.<sup>63</sup>

One of the most remarkable aspects of Marianne Nevill's battles to overturn her classification as a lunatic was the catalogue of individuals with whom she managed to correspond. This right to maintain correspondence involved many protracted battles with her various keepers and her sister's legal representatives over their suppression of her letters. The more notable of Nevill's correspondence included the then Lord Chancellor of Ireland, William Plunkett, and his successor in the post, Sir Edward Sugden, Lady Judith Montefiore (wife of Sir Moses Montefiore) and Edhem Bey, an ambassador for the Court of Egypt.<sup>64</sup>

This correspondence gives some insight into the position of the mad in the eyes of the law at the time. In May 1839 a letter from Nevill to the Lord Chancellor complained that any chance of 'impartial justice [was] cruelly denied' and stressed the primacy of property considerations in the court's decision, claiming that the allegations regarding her lunacy were part of a family conspiracy. Her awareness of the limitations of the way in which the case was loaded against her was very clear, pointing out that her 'own examination, of an hour and a half, in the Judge's Chamber was totally overlooked...although in similar trials in England the verdict is supposed to turn on the examination of the individual who is charged with insanity.'<sup>65</sup> On the day of the enquiry in the Commission *de Lunatico* ruling she had gone to the court only to be refused entry and only got to plead her case privately to the jury in the judge's chambers, away from the eyes and ears of public gallery and newspapers reporters. She was not even allowed to be present in court for her own trial – a privilege even the most heinous criminals

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander McCaul, *The conversion and restoration of the Jews. Two sermons, preached before the University of Dublin* (Dublin, 1837), pp. 1-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Narrative*, p. 204.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, pp 45, 69-72, 138.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*, pp 12-13, 53, 96.

were allowed, according to the anonymous narrator of *Narratives*. That this was a landmark case was clear in the press reaction; it was the first time that someone officially categorised as insane (and a woman at that) had appealed to the Lord Chancellor against a verdict. In fact, the main thrust of press commentary in Limerick was on the legal precedence than on anything to do with insanity or with this woman's personal situation.<sup>66</sup>

The Nevill case suggests that irrespective of wealth or the methods and setting of incarceration the label of lunatic was discriminatory.<sup>67</sup> However, social position did have some impact on an individual's situation as a lunatic. It enabled Nevill to arrange a personal meeting with the Lord Chancellor, after he made it clear to her keeper that he did not permit any person to interfere with her letters for 'she might write to the Great Mogul [of Egypt] if she had a mind to' and lifted many of the restrictions under which she had been held.<sup>68</sup> The increasing prominence of medical men in judgements relating to insanity – in fact, the tendency of a verdict to rest within their hands – was again noticeable at this stage of the Nevill case. After a visit from the Lord Chancellor's secretary in 1843 she was finally allowed to approach different physicians to those that had originally classified her as monomaniac and in 1843 a joint certificate of several professional men respecting her sanity and capability was issued.<sup>69</sup> Yet although deemed of sound mind and capabilities by visitors, medical-men, the press and two successive Lord Chancellors (she met with Sir Edward Sugden too) the verdict of the commission of lunacy was never superseded – perhaps, ironically, a sign that despite the increasing importance of medical evidence in such case, legal categorisation could endure

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<sup>66</sup> *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 January 1838.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59. Throughout her plight Lady Barton offered little help as, in her own words, one 'could *not suppose* she was *such a fool* as to put her name to paper to *sign away £500 a year*'.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, pp 97-98. On 13 April of 1839 Lord Lieutenant Plunkett issued a note that listed the comforts Marianne was entitled to and the restrictions placed upon her that needed to be lifted (*ibid*, p97-98). She was allowed to have full air and exercise, pocket-money for charitable and other purposes, to meet with clergymen as she so wished and to receive the Sacrament.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p. 59.

*33, Upper Rutland-Street, 23 June, 1843.*

We have this day visited Miss Nevill, and after conversing with her on a variety of subjects for a considerable time, we are unable to detect any proof of insanity.

We have looked at her accounts, which appear to be kept with correctness. We are therefore of opinion, so far as these opportunities have enabled us to judge, that she is quite capable of managing her own affairs.

(Robert Adams, Charles Benson, Christopher Asken, Auley Bannon, J. Henry, Patrick Walsh),

irrespective of medical opinion. Nevill was still troubled by the label of monomaniac even though the restrictions on her property and the control of her finances had been nearly completely lifted. However, her writings (partisan though they are) have given considerable insight into the difficulties inherent, even within the elite, with the categorization, definitions, stigmatisation and treatments of madness in pre-famine Ireland.

## Conclusion:

In 1899, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* asked: ‘How shall we instil the correct ideas of insanity into the public mind?’, lamenting that ‘there is no lack of desire for information but the only kind that seems to be absorbed is the imperfect and erroneous, and the more erroneous and imperfect the more readily it is apparently absorbed.’<sup>1</sup> This conclusion, presented half a century after the period covered in the present study, can be applied to the Limerick context in the fifty years after 1772, and especially to the context of the local Limerick press.

Limerick provides a suitable focus for this study on the press and insanity since it was the site of two different institutions (House of Industry and District Lunatic Asylum) that provided accommodation for those deemed insane, and it had a long-running and widely circulating local newspaper, the *Limerick Chronicle*, whose proprietors were closely linked with the House of Industry. Though the House was not initially intended as a refuge for the insane, the mad came to be a familiar and recognised group within that institution as is evident from coverage in advertisements, commentary and press reports in the Limerick newspapers. Catering for the insane became a major problem for the House, and though accommodation and care improved marginally in the early nineteenth century, the shortcomings of the House helped to convince reformers of the need to press for the establishment of the new Asylum – something that intensified existing local political tensions in the city.

No historical study to date has considered how the Irish print media portrayed madness and the mentally ill. This present thesis attempts to fill this vacuum in the Limerick context, being constructed in the first instance around reports of madness in the press of Limerick city itself, against the context of broader newspaper reports. Even when examined in conjunction with other primary materials, newspapers have serious limitations since they do not present impartial, emotionally neutral accounts, since they mirror the values, morals and beliefs of only particular sectors of society. In the Limerick

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<sup>1</sup> Anon., ‘Psychiatry and sensationalism’, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 29 July 1999, reprinted in Jennifer Reiling (ed.), ‘JAMA 100 years ago’ in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 282(4), (1999), p. 308.

context of the period 1772-1845, this sector, represented by the *Limerick Chronicle*, was protestant, middle class and (inevitably) male, and with politically conservative. Moreover, most coverage of madness failed to discuss the causes, cures or possibilities of treatment for the condition, and reports were shaped by factors including the location of the incident of madness, and the social status and sex of those involved. These issues were, however, eclipsed by others, and for an ephemeral medium like the press a lot could depend of the 'timing' of the mad behaviour. Cox noted that the degree of detail within newspaper coverage of lunatic certifications in the twentieth century 'was dependant on other newsworthy events', and a similar condition was apparent in the pre-famine press discussions of madness.<sup>2</sup>

For newspapers in Limerick, accounts of madness – even accounts with an explicit moral or educational intent – were subsidiary to another consideration, the capacity of the account to attract the reader. Selling newspapers was a business, far more than was mad medicine. Output was driven by an overriding need to gain and sustain readers' attention and information was a raw product that could be processed into a form to be used to achieve this end. Therefore, stories were re-packaged into forms that were already familiar and were perceived as interesting to the printers and proprietors themselves and to the target audience.

A significant shortcoming of the local newspapers in Limerick was the tendency of the owners and editors to let their personal bias and political partisanship determine what was published and shape the language used to describe mad individuals and/or their actions. Often this seems to have been influenced by local social and political sensibilities and by fear of losing local advertisers rather than by any desire to discuss madness on its own terms. This often led to a distortion of facts, if not their complete suppression – most significantly in the attitude to the opening of the District Lunatic Asylum in 1827. Consequently, representations of insanity in the pre-famine newspapers of Limerick City must be understood in a socio-cultural context. Legal and political circumstances influenced depictions and representations of madness, and reports of madness in the press must be interpreted with caution.

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<sup>2</sup> Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 105.

Political concerns dominated the coverage at certain times. This was especially obvious in the coverage of George III's madness within the pages of the Limerick newspapers and their Dublin counterparts, where the king's madness was discussed, not on its own terms or from a medical viewpoint, but with an eye on the political crisis generated by the royal illness. The King and his affliction, it can be argued, were 'used' by the press in a political way, and this tendency continued throughout the following forty years, when the local newspapers in Limerick city 'used' the madness of Fr. John Carroll to attack the Catholic Association 1824. Stereotypes therefore endured due to an inability to discuss madness *per se*.

It was not until the expansion of the newspaper industry in the 1830s, by which time the district asylums were established and utilised, that a more complete coverage of the district asylum system appeared in the Limerick press. During the 1830s, when the number of newspapers produced in Limerick increased dramatically, these competing newspapers finally discussed the *Limerick Chronicle's* close links with the local House of Industry. The Watson family, owners of the *Chronicle*, were now called upon by rival publications to inform the public of the financial benefits they received for the insertion in their newspaper of advertisements, notices and reports from that institution. Yet the *Chronicle* still remained secretive about the running of the House: it did not discuss that institution's administration or the quality of treatment it provided for its inmates. The *Chronicle* was able to survive the challenge of most other newspapers which, faced with high costs and restrictive laws, soon collapsed, leaving the *Chronicle* largely unchallenged in relation to its links with the House of Industry and its partisan reporting on that institution and the new District Asylum. The political partisanship of the *Chronicle* may also explain why there was little publicity given to changing attitudes to insanity, since the local MP, Thomas Spring-Rice, one of the loudest voices for the reform of care for the mad, belonged to the political faction in the city which threatened the position of the *Chronicle* and its owners.

The tendency towards sensationalism also worked against the local press discussing changes in the attitude to the insane and their care. Madness was often presented in the newspaper as a way of sensationalising deviant behaviour, all in the interest of generating sales. In reports of suicides, and less frequently of murders, the

madness of the perpetrator was used to explain the action or as a mitigating circumstance. Both social class and the location of the incident determined the press attitude. Few details were given regarding local suicides or murders, especially those involving individuals of high social status. On the other hand, shocking or especially bloody murders or suicides committed *outside* Limerick received considerable coverage in the local newspapers, as did the killing or self-killing of people of a lower class. On the other hand, social position was not always the main factor in determining how madness incidents of madness were reported. The label of lunatic remained discriminatory, and the ability to manage one's own affairs was often a key criterion for establishing mental competence in the press as well as in court.<sup>3</sup> However, the social class of those involved in incidences of madness (especially in murders) was a more influential factor than gender in shaping the methods of representation employed by the press. In contrast, in cases of suicide, the opposite was the case, with gender being emphasised more than social position.

Cox has noted how sensational coverage of local lunatic commissions and court cases became more frequent in the early twentieth century, when 'cases that had once merited a short sombre account were subsequently described in more sensational terms'.<sup>4</sup> In the pre-famine Limerick context, local instances of madness were also skimmed over or ignored in the newspapers, but the sensational aspect of reporting that Cox mentions strongly influenced representations of mad in this earlier period, too. Reporting on madness in the Limerick newspapers remained sensational. Although these representations were modified over time to reflect both the increasingly 'moral' approach to treatment and the legal and institutional reforms of the period, the sensational aspects of press reporting of madness remained. Entertainment and sensation prevailed more so than any specific desire to transfer knowledge regarding on-going reforms and developments to the public. The more macabre or sensational an occurrence of madness was then the more likely it was to be included in the pages of the newspapers.

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<sup>3</sup> Suzuki, *Madness at home*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>4</sup> Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 106.

In reality, the Limerick press paid little attention to calls for reform in the institutional provisions and approach to madness, though such calls were made from the early years of the nineteenth century onwards. While commenting favourably from 1827 onwards on the much extolled 'moral treatment' approach of the new asylum and the grandeur of the building, the *Limerick Chronicle* gave more attention to the rules and regulations concerning admittance to the new institution. On the other hand, much more prominence was given in press reports to changes in the criminal laws concerning lunacy. As the categories of insanity broadened to include 'temporary' insanity, the law as it applied to insane criminals was presented as adequate, leading to the introduction of the 1838 Dangerous Lunatics Act.<sup>5</sup> As the deviant and criminal aspects of madness were among those most featured in the Limerick newspapers, the 1838 legislation regarding criminal lunatics was now given coverage within the local press, while dangerous lunatic certifications were reported, though still concentrating on the distant rather than the local.<sup>6</sup>

Different levels of care for the insane existed in the pre-famine Limerick context, and each was covered in different ways by the local press. Firstly, the House of Industry's record in this regard was damaged by the fact that it was grossly overcrowded, dirty, and (though the record is unclear) without any understanding of changes in the attitude towards the treatment of the insane.<sup>7</sup> The local press, however, probably because of its proprietors' links with the House, provided little commentary on the institution's shortcomings. In the Lunatic Asylum, on the other hand, there was an increasing emphasis on 'moral treatment' and on the fact that curable lunatics could be put to work for both their own benefit and the benefit of the institution in which they were resident. Initially, the *Chronicle* ignored the debates on 'moral treatment' and gave no prominence to the opening of the Asylum, but by the 1830s did reflect in its commentary some of the

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<sup>5</sup> Finnane, *Insanity*, pp. 89, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 105. This approach prevailed immediately following the 1838 legislative changes though Cox has demonstrated that more information was forthcoming on local cases as the century went on.

<sup>7</sup> In fact judgements of the Limerick House of Industry may not have been entirely fair as the base-line quality of care provided by the house in Limerick was superior to its alternatives viz. impoverished life in the community.

newer ideas regarding the treatment of insanity.<sup>8</sup> The third type of care for the insane – that for fee-paying patients – was hardly mentioned in the press. While official documentation and medical journals point to the existence and utilisation of a private fee-paying asylum in the vicinity of Limerick, this institution was never mentioned in reports, editorials or even in the advertising columns. Bushy Park, the private fee-paying asylum in Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, seems to have remained a discreet place that the wealthy could turn to in times of crisis.<sup>9</sup> Though expensive and exclusive, this local privately run and owned asylums stayed secretive and hidden away from the public, as did those who received treatment within its walls. Indeed, Marianne Nevill's public and private writings (discussed in Chapter Four) shed more light on treatment of insanity among the elite more than anything available within the pre-famine press.

The growing role of doctors in court discussions of madness is reflected in the Limerick context, though not always given detailed attention in the press.<sup>10</sup> The researcher has to turn to the letters sent to the editors to discover that physicians were among the main commentators on madness in the press, especially from the instigation of the 1817 reforms onwards. The press rarely contained any discussion of medical diagnoses, since madness was used to explain deviant behaviour rather than as an object of discussion in its own right. It was only when a case caused sufficient sensation to warrant continuous press commentary that doctor's opinions and testimonies were given prominence. For instance, the initial reports on Fr. John Carroll's actions in Wexford in the mid-1820s included no discussion on the medical view of his insanity or on the methods of treatment and care available until his trial, when the examining doctors' testimonies were reported. Medical publications on madness were given equally little coverage apart from occasional references within correspondence from correspondents, usually physicians. However, scarce though these commentaries were, they ensured that the press of Limerick was at least aware of the up-to-date medical writings and were informed, no matter how superficially, by changes in medical opinion.

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<sup>8</sup> Within five years of opening, the District Asylum suffered much the same problems with overcrowding and catering with incurables as did the House of Industry.

<sup>9</sup> Demand always seems to have exceeded supply; Croly (ed.), *The Irish Medical Directory 1843*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 79.

As Chapter Four established, the interplay between religion and insanity did not have a major influence on Limerick newspapers' coverage of madness during the period under consideration. Representations were not religiously biased unless the actions carried out in the name of religion were considered abnormal, fanatical or violated the accepted social norms. Within the Limerick local press, representations of religious enthusiasm illustrated the mixed attitudes towards the perceived relationship between religion and mental disorders.<sup>11</sup> However, this approach could change in times of high sectarian tension when madness associated with religion (similar to the press depictions of foreign politics discussed in Chapter One) was presented as proof of a character inferiority or deficiency. This approach reflected and enforced the prevailing depiction within the press that excess (whether political, religious or otherwise) was closely linked with madness.

The thesis, concentrating on seven decades in pre-famine Limerick, has used the local newspaper press as a barometer of changing attitudes to madness as well as asking whether the newspaper played any role in influencing popular perceptions on insanity and the insane. It is appropriate now to return to Foucault, who saw a myriad of explanations behind any single newspaper report. He claimed that as so many diverse meanings exist beneath the surface, the report presents only an enigmatic face. This is true of nineteenth century Limerick press reports on madness. Content and modes of representation depended upon the judgement of those in control of the press, which in the Limerick context meant a small elite protestant group. The impossibility of gauging the public reception of news items of any sort is equally obvious when we try to evaluate the impact of the press on public perceptions of insanity. What is certain is that once labelled as mad, an individual was not permitted to maintain any public identity of which the press approved. Therefore, though by the end of the period under discussion insanity was described in the Limerick press as misunderstood, the old stereotypes remained and even after discharge from an asylum the label of lunatic followed individuals into their everyday life and social dealings. Geographic, economic and class issues had clouded opportunities for balanced representations of the mad and madness, and the lunatic was still constructed and portrayed as a distant, deviant other.

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<sup>11</sup> Cox, *Negotiating*, p. 214.

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