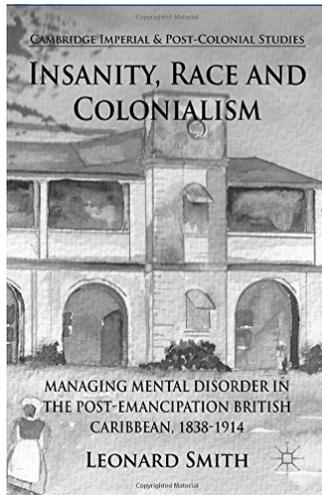


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Insanity, Race
and Colonialism:
Managing Mental
Disorder in the Post-
Emancipation British
Caribbean, 1838–1914**

By Leonard Smith.
Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
£60.00 (hb). 304 pp.
ISBN 9781137028624

This is explicitly an institutional study and so perhaps it misses out on some of the intellectual excitement we associate with Fisher (*Colonial Madness: Mental Health in the Barbadian Social Order*), André (*L'Inceste Focal dans La Famille Noire Antillaise*) or with Mahone and Vaughan (ed. *Psychiatry and Empire*). Its theoretical stance, briefly stated, is that the organisation and conditions in British Caribbean asylums after Emancipation in 1838 tended to follow those of the colonies themselves – declining economic significance, half-hearted colonial benevolence and benign neglect. Smith argues that the British mental health model, based on the asylum with watered down moral management emphasising non-restraint and organised occupation, was transported to the Empire, initially to the White settler communities and then, in the mid-19th century, to the Caribbean. There people with mental illness had previously been lodged in the prisons, and the early mental hospitals were often established in disused barracks where attendant problems of inadequate sewage (leading to cholera and dysentery) and physical restraint continued: metropolitan money went to the planters in compensation for the loss of their slaves rather than for local social and educational improvements.

In 1858, just before Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion, a scandal at the Kingston Lunatic Asylum reached the Colonial Office and the Commissioners in Lunacy in London. It involved partiality, violence ('tanking' – similar to waterboarding) and the non-discharge of patients, who remained economically useful. Smith offers poignant patient testimonies submitted to the subsequent inquiry. Reforms were enacted, particularly a laundry, bakery and a fishery with vegetable planting, a monthly magazine, sports days, dances and cricket, but complaints continued of overcrowding, understaffing and violence between patients and even periodic return to the use of restraint.

The patients admitted were predominantly from the 'labouring classes' (a non-racial euphemism for the darker skinned population) and indentured immigrants from India or from other West Indian islands. Alcohol and cannabis were blamed as immediate precipitating factors, along with a poor physical condition, but also religious revivalism: Smith discusses the famous case of Alexander Bedward, a pastor who said he would ascend into heaven and was then arrested for sedition

and sent to the asylum. Admission depended on such court orders or on certificates signed by a doctor and a magistrate, usually after violence or arson or the public stripping off of clothes. There is little extant information on physical treatment except citation of potassium bromide or chloral hydrate.

Explicit racism appears absent, concealed beneath a stuttering benevolence, indifference and random abuse. There is no evidence that local psychiatry contributed to a more informed debate on racial psychiatry as happened with the British African psychiatrists of the 1940s and 1950s. The Caribbean remained an imperial backwater: prejudice and neglect undoubtedly, but hardly practicable ideologies for racial or cultural inferiority.

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**A Humour of Love:
A Memoir**

By Robert Montagu.
Quartet, 2014.
£20.00 (hb). 296 pp.
ISBN: 9780704373662

The scale, ruthlessness and ingenuity of Savile's evil, a man close to those in power and honoured by them, has ensured that child sexual abuse is now a preoccupation of the popular media. A recent series of high-profile celebrity trials often appear as impotent retribution: too little too late. Here is the desperate hand-wringing of a failed and possibly even collusive society. Children's homes, Christian orders, the BBC and the highest levels of the government all seem to have been involved.

Robert Montagu's memoir is timely, for without sensationalism he bravely details his abuse between the age 7 and 11 by his father, the distinguished Conservative politician Victor Montagu, formerly Lord Hinchinbrooke.

He describes his father's loneliness and his own search for love and attention, which is so often exploited by grooming. The abuse became an integral part of his life, perpetuated over many years – even unwittingly supported by family members who do not suspect or cannot take the time to look again at strange absences, intimacies and rather too many gifts and treats. His family had busy lives. Sisters were grown up, brother off to Cambridge and mother was painting and living with her girlfriend in London. He implies that for some it was not the abuse so much as the reporting that was the sin: attention-seeking or false memory syndrome.

Later chapters report the author's bewilderment at how a Christian society could allow what often was a daily unwanted ritual, posing pertinent rhetorical questions to the church, his seducer and other family members.