

Bedlam: Madness

- **What is “melancholia”?**
(*In short, melancholia is depression and one of the “four humours.”*)
- **How was “madness” portrayed in the arts in this era? What kinds of behaviors were viewed as madness by people of this time?**
(*In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, madness results as a “loss of mirth” and depressing gloom and inactivity in the character of Hamlet. In Thomas Middleton’s The Changeling, asylum inmates are whipped and trained to be royal entertainers. In John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi, a “show or madmen” are used to torment a character.*)
- **What kinds of theories or causes of madness are cited?**
(*“Unrequited love” is cited as one of the “sources of excessive melancholy.” In Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, three kinds of madness are cited: the lunatic, the lover, and the poet.*)
- **What are the “four humours”?**
(*The four humors are Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholy, and Phlegmatic. An imbalance in one of the four humours was said to be the cause of madness, where people lost their sense of reason and behaved “like beasts.”*)
- **What differences are there between how Americans today view “melancholy” or “madness” and how the British viewed it at this time?**
(*Accept all reasonable answers.*)

The London Spy

- **How would you describe the attitude of the visitors?**
(*Answers will vary. In general, it seems they are cold, critical, and condemning of anything that does not align with their own personal, “proper” views and standards of behavior. Some will suggest that this was not uncommon for a Londoner of this era.*)
- **What do you think is the reason for their critical perspectives?**
(*Answers will vary. One view is that fear, ignorance, and emotional insecurity lie behind their attitudes toward the people at Bedlam.*)
- **What was the scene at Bedlam like?**
(*Approaching Bedlam, the writer said that they had “heard such a rattling of chains, drumming of doors, ranting, holloaing, singing, and rattling.” Once inside, they witnessed a number of “lunatics” either confined or wandering around as visitors “observed” them. Men and women residents were also confined to separate quarters.*)
- **How did you feel about the patients and what was happening?**
(*Answers will vary.*)
- **Do you imagine that a scene like this could happen today? Why or why not?**
(*Answers will vary. Most, if not all, students would argue that it could not happen today, because more is known about mental disabilities and that advances in treatment and social perspectives have made most institutions therapeutic—as opposed to “entertaining.”*)
- **How do you think the symptoms and behaviors of the patients would be viewed by people today?**
(*Answers will vary. Thanks to advances in mental health therapy and education, most people view abnormal behavior with more acceptance and understanding and do not characterize it as “hellishness” or as any great, unexplainable mystery. Those with disorders are also seen as treatable people with lives and talents, as opposed to “lost lunatics” to be “abandoned.”*)

- **How do you think the patients felt about being on display?**
(Answers will vary. The residents must have clearly disliked being caged and on display with visitors observing and questioning them, as the clever “treasonous” man and “old, grey-headed wretch” showed.)
- **What other aspects of this account of Bedlam either surprised or bothered you?**
(Answers will vary.)

Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, Chapter XX

- **How does this account of a Bedlam visit differ from the visit made in “The London Spy”?**
(Answers will vary. Among the differences are that this group is more compassionate and conscientious about the suffering and human injustice that the people at Bedlam suffer, particularly from the public visitations. Mackenzie’s accounts of the residents are also more fair and humane, revealing that the mentally ill people there had once had normal, successful, and respectable lives before suffering great [and understandable] personal declines.)
- **Judging from the conductor, what conclusions can you make about the quality of care the residents at Bedlam received?**
(Answers will vary. Considering the conductor’s motivation to give his guests value by showing them the most pitiful of Bedlam, many will conclude that the institution is more about entertainment than care. It seems that the residents are left to themselves [and to the visitors] and, because of the era, do not have access to proper treatment and medication.)
- **What is significant about the truth behind the notion that “the passions of men are temporary madhouses”?**
(Answers will vary. One view is that all people have within them the capacity for confusion and even “madness”—suggesting that “normal” people are not far removed from those who become “mentally ill.”)
- **What is your impression of the story of the young lady (and her tearful connection with Harley)?**
(Answers will vary. Like Harley and the others, many will be able to relate to the young, dignified lady’s broken-hearted story. Many will find it more tragic because this seemingly functional person appears to be a victim of her circumstances [and love] and could greatly improve her condition with proper care and support. Her ring gift to Harley also reveals the depth of her suffering—and the extent to which the best and purest of humanity can “naturally” deteriorate.)
- **To what extent do you think society is to blame for the decline of the residents and the chaos of Bedlam?**
(Answers will vary.)
- **What else did you find surprising, insightful, or tragic about Mackenzie’s account of Bedlam?**
(Answers will vary.)
- **If this were the 18th century and you had the chance to visit Bedlam, would you? Why or why not?**
(Answers will vary.)