



# Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine

By Andrew Scull

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## Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine By Andrew Scull

The loss of reason, a sense of alienation from the commonsense world we all like to imagine we inhabit, the shattering emotional turmoil that seizes hold and won't let go--these are some of the traits we associate with madness. Today, mental disturbance is most commonly viewed through a medical lens, but societies have also sought to make sense of it through religion or the supernatural, or by constructing psychological or social explanations in an effort to tame the demons of unreason. *Madness in Civilization* traces the long and complex history of this affliction and our attempts to treat it.

Beautifully illustrated throughout, *Madness in Civilization* takes readers from antiquity to today, painting a vivid and often harrowing portrait of the different ways that cultures around the world have interpreted and responded to the seemingly irrational, psychotic, and insane. From the Bible to Sigmund Freud, from exorcism to mesmerism, from Bedlam to Victorian asylums, from the theory of humors to modern pharmacology, the book explores the manifestations and meanings of madness, its challenges and consequences, and our varied responses to it. It also looks at how insanity has haunted the imaginations of artists and writers and describes the profound influence it has had on the arts, from drama, opera, and the novel to drawing, painting, and sculpture.

Written by one of the world's preeminent historians of psychiatry, *Madness in Civilization* is a panoramic history of the human encounter with unreason.

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## **Editorial Review**

Review

**Honorable Mention for the 2016 PROSE Award in Psychology, Association of American Publishers**

**One of *Kirkus Reviews'* Best Nonfiction Books of 2015 in History**

**One of the *New York Post's* Favorite Books of 2015**

**One of *Paste Magazine's* 30 Best Nonfiction Books of 2015**

"Sociologist and historian Andrew Scull is too rigorous a scholar to indulge in polemics. Instead, Mr. Scull has set himself the task of providing his readers with a clear, engaged and global overview of madness from the ancient world to the present . . . [his] tone is elegant; his scholarship, immaculate. The story he tells is riveting." **--Joanna Bourke, *Wall Street Journal***

"Scull's knowledge of music and art, cultural change, medicine, religion, and politics make this a great achievement in psychiatric history . . . [a] dynamic, readable chronicle and excellent reference." **--Library Journal, starred review**

"[A] far-ranging, illuminating study of minds gone awry across space and time. . . . Scull is sharp on every point, but some of his best moments come when he explains the introduction of psychoanalysis into pop culture in the postwar period, thanks in good part to Hollywood, and when he takes a sidelong look at both the drug-dependent psychiatry of today and its discontents, such as Scientology. To be read as both corrective and supplement to Foucault, Szasz, and Rieff. Often brilliant and always luminous and rewarding." **--Kirkus, starred review**

"Methodical yet always engrossing. . . . Scull's book is an outstanding illumination." **--Oliver Kamm, *Times of London***

"[A] powerful and disturbing book . . . fascinating . . . engrossing." **--John Carey, *Sunday Times***

"[Scull's] wide-ranging survey . . . chronologically presents factual and imaginative material about insanity. Scull, a historian of psychiatry for almost 40 years, has been well-served by his publishers, who have laid on more than 80 black-and-white images and almost 50 high-quality colour plates." **--Sarah Wise, *Financial Times***

"I've only just started Andrew Scull's *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity*, but already it's taught me a lot about unreason, in all its guises. . . . The in in Scull's title is a nice reproach to Foucault; we like to think of insanity as existing apart from, or before, the constructs of society--and certainly we try to put it there--but Scull's history unpacks centuries of our cultural baggage about madness, arguing that it's 'indelibly part of civilization, not located outside it.'" **--Dan Piepenbring, *Paris Review***

"[A] gigantic intellectual enterprise . . . what makes Scull so worth heeding is his reluctance to adopt a fixed position. Again and again, his drift is to emphasize how little we still know about mental disorders. He staunchly refuses to come down on the side of either biological or experiential explanations. . . . The standoff between the advocates of nature over nurture is very like that between materialism and religion. Both must surely be relevant to the complexity of human social experience. Thank goodness we have voices such as Andrew Scull's to keep us sane." **--Salley Vickers, *Telegraph***

"as illuminating as it is compendious...a magisterial survey."--**John Gray, *New Statesman***

"[a] vast and rather brilliant book."--**Matt Haig, *Independent***

"*Madness in Civilization* is a landmark study, as authoritative as it is readable in its account of the devastatingly sad backstory of human society. It's enraging, intensely unsparing reading, but it's a masterpiece." .--**Steve Donoghue, *Open Letters Monthly***

"[A] rich and thorough cultural history of madness from the Bible to Freud. . . . I couldn't put it down and have dog-eared almost every one of those 400 pages."--**Susannah Cahalan, *New York Post***

"In this centuries-spanning history, Andrew Scull reveals how mental illness was treated by numerous societies. . . . *Madness in Civilization* ultimately tears down the supposed barriers between society and the mentally ill, highlighting the many ways so-called 'madness' has been appropriated, marginalized and understood in the course of human history."--**Bridey Heing, *Paste Magazine***

"Scull is . . . keenly attuned to the larger social contexts in which madness was both experienced and influenced. . . . Scull provides an illuminating commentary on the broad social and cultural contexts in which madness has occurred. . . . [W]ell-crafted."--**Raymond E. Fancher, *PsychCRITIQUES***

"*Madness in Civilization* entirely deserves the applause it has received. This is the best single volume yet written on the cultural history of madness, and it is also the synoptic masterpiece of Scull's career. . . . [A] rich, lucid, outstandingly good book, one that merits a place on the shelves of any practitioner, sufferer, or interested common reader."--**Richard Barnett, *Lancet Psychiatry***

"Andrew Scull, who teaches sociology and science studies at the University of California, San Diego, presents a comprehensive history of mental illness in his hefty but engaging volume. . . . A humane call to pay attention to lives that have been hidden, demonized, and stigmatized."--**Ellen Painter Dollar, *Christian Century***

"[A] well-written and enjoyable book."--**Alex Barnard, *European Journal of Sociology***

"*Madness in Civilization* is an impressive, mature and fluent book. It is a powerful work of cultural history and it contains much evidence from literature, art, film, music, physicians' writing and reflection, medical writing and more."--**Catharine Coleborne, *Medical History***

From the Back Cover

"A wonderful book, fascinating and beautifully written, with Scull's usual verve and erudition. *Madness in Civilization* explores how ancient and medieval societies coped with psychosis and shows that, brain imaging and psychotropic drugs notwithstanding, modern psychiatry has much to learn from these societies."--**Sylvia Nasar, author of *A Beautiful Mind***

"An engaging, learned, and wonderfully thought-provoking history of human efforts to understand and manage those behaviors we call mad. An uncommon combination of learning and accessible writing, Scull's admirable book is a must-read for anyone interested in this 'most solitary of afflictions.'"--**Charles Rosenberg, Harvard University**

"In this engrossing book, Scull takes us from ancient Greece to the pharmacopoeias of today to give us the long view of how reason has understood and treated unreason. This is history at its best, scintillating in its

detail and passionate about a subject that concerns us all."--**Lisa Appignanesi, author of *Trials of Passion: Crimes in the Name of Love and Madness***

"*Madness in Civilization* is a brilliant, provocative, and hugely entertaining history of the treatment and mistreatment of the mentally ill. Packed with bizarre details and disturbing facts, Andrew Scull's book offers fresh and compelling insights on the way medicine's inability to solve the mystery of madness has both haunted and shaped two thousand years of culture. Required reading for anyone who has ever gone to a shrink!"--**Dirk Wittenborn, author of *Pharmakon***

"Andrew Scull is the premier historian of psychiatry in the Anglophone world, and this book triumphantly demonstrates this. Taking a broad canvas, from antiquity to modernity, Scull dissects what madness has meant to societies throughout history and throughout the world. He writes with passion but humor, has a brilliant eye for a pungent quotation or a telling story, and holds the reader spellbound. This is a compelling book from a master of his craft."--**William F. Bynum, coeditor of the *Dictionary of Medical Biography***

"Dr. Scull is one of the preeminent historians of psychiatry in the world today. There is almost no one else who could write a volume of this kind with the panache he brings to it, the ability to hold both a lay and an academic readership in thrall at the same time, and the sense of balance and proportion that comes to some with experience but to others not at all. There is no other volume comparable to this in scope and this is a once in a generation effort."--**David Healy, author of *Pharmageddon***

"Andrew Scull is probably our most knowledgeable and certainly most readable historian of madness. In his new book, the magisterial *Madness in Civilization*, he presents a panoramic view of the subject that's both clear-eyed and critical. Crisply written, and furnished with a wealth of cultural and clinical reference, this is a great, tragic story."--**Patrick McGrath, author of *Asylum***

"A work of heroic scholarship, an eloquent overview of the changing theories and treatments of madness from ancient religion, medicine, and myth to contemporary neuroscience and psychopharmacology. Scull shows not only how writers, artists, and composers have taken madness as a muse, but also how the shifting symbolic forms of unreason are truly part of its history. Compendious and compassionate."--**Elaine Showalter, professor emeritus, Princeton University, author of *The Female Malady***

#### About the Author

**Andrew Scull** is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Science Studies at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *Masters of Bedlam: The Transformation of the Mad-Doctoring Trade* (Princeton).

#### Users Review

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##### Lauren Graves:

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**Jere Araujo:**

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