

‘Tales of Wonder and Horror’: Coverage of insanity
in the Leeds press, 1808-1840

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Abstract

The press was at the centre of the reform of the meaning of insanity, during its evolution from an equivocal eighteenth-century concept of melancholia to a medicalised Victorian notion of ‘lunacy’. During the late Georgian era newspapers provided a public forum for the opinion of newly emerging psychiatric practitioners and fostered the fears and concerns about mental illness and its supposed increase. The press was also the main source of news on crime, providing readers with reports on criminal insanity and suicide. In the first half of the nineteenth century, newspaper contents included official legal reports, as well as editorial commentary and excerpts from other publications, and newspaper articles can rarely be traced to one single author. Historians of British insanity avoid consulting periodical literature, choosing to use asylum records and coroners’ reports, as these sources are more straightforward than newspapers. However, Rab Houston’s recent study of the coverage of suicide in the north of Britain shows that the provincial press has been unjustly overlooked and can offer the material for a unique social analysis. Asylum records and coroners’ records do not contain the same detail provided in the press. Newspaper commentary can arguably reveal contemporary attitudes towards insanity and, moreover, sources such as asylum records only deal with the lower-class patients, as the middle- and upper-class insane were usually privately detained.

This thesis examines the press coverage of insanity in Leeds newspapers, and expands on previous research by looking at the way insanity was portrayed in the two most popular publications in the industrial region of Yorkshire: the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Leeds Mercury*. Chapter one focuses on legal cases that featured a verdict of insanity and explores the language used by the press in the reports of, mainly, violent domestic crime. Chapter two looks at reports of suicide and considers how contemporary views on financial and moral despondency influenced the portrayal of self-murder. Chapter three considers editorial articles that cannot be described as either crime or suicide reports. This chapter uncovers the presence of surprisingly humorous and entertaining articles on insanity found in editorials and the ‘Miscellany’ sections of the newspapers. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the reportage of insanity in the Leeds press was sensational, moralistic and selectively sympathetic; furthermore, such portrayal of insanity was reinforced throughout the body of the paper. Leeds newspapers segregated the insane by adopting a moralising tone and by choosing to use class-specific language towards the insane of different social ranks.

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Dangerous Lunatic. – Samuel Penny, a lunatic, was on Monday brought before the magistrates, charged with having committed a brutal assault upon his father, on Sunday night, in Bridge-street, in this town, by beating him with a pair of tongs, with such violence as to fracture his skull dangerously in several places...the prisoner was remanded, but there is little doubt he will be removed to the lunatic asylum.

– *Leeds Mercury*, 16 July 1836.

Suicide. – On Saturday last an inquest was held at the Harrison's Arms Inn, on view of the body of Jane Whitley, a prostitute, for some time past an inmate of the Workhouse, and suffering from disease, who, strangled herself on the morning of that day, by tying a handkerchief three or four times tightly round her neck when in bed. The Jury returned a verdict of "Temporary Insanity."

– *Leeds Mercury*, 3 September 1836.

Anecdote of Insanity. – A gentleman who had made his escape from the asylum, after being taken, on finding himself closely watched, came to me and said 'I confess that I have been wrong, in escaping; but to put you at ease on my account, I promise upon my honour that from this time I will never run away again, and you well know that I am too tenacious of my honour ever to violate it.' Soon after this, he again, however, made his escape; and I was put to much trouble and expense in having him brought back. On his return, he came with a great deal of confidence to shake hands with me...With a most sly look, he replied, 'Sir I did not run away, I *walked* every step!'

– *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 March 1823.

Introduction

The press was at the centre of the reform of the meaning of insanity, during its evolution from an equivocal eighteenth-century concept of melancholia to a medicalised Victorian notion of ‘lunacy’. During the late Georgian era, newspapers provided a public forum for the opinion of newly emerging psychiatric practitioners and fostered fears and concerns about mental illness and its supposed increase. Though reports on insanity could differ in tone both the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Leeds Mercury* portrayed mental illness in a scandalous, moralistic, selectively sympathetic, gendered and, occasionally, in a humorous way, selecting and presenting material on insanity to cater for a specific audience.

The *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury*, like most newspapers in the late Georgian era, were published and read by the middle classes. ‘Class’ is discussed in this thesis as a stratified body defined by the values and behaviours of its members, rather than by traditional socio-economic context (i.e. employment, property). Some of the main ways in which this thesis defines the examined newspapers as middle-class are the presence of Malthusian rhetoric, Evangelical ideas, and increasing social activism. This thesis adopts E. P. Thompson’s definition of class as a relationship, which was defined by common experiences and differences, rather than being a simple economic category.¹ It adopts a similar definition of gender, understanding masculine and feminine as mutually constructed relationships, which rely on the claiming of an identity with one group in relation to another.²

Still, scholars consulting early nineteenth-century media need to acknowledge the presence of economic and political class demarcation. Middle-class professionals were the ones who could afford to buy newspapers as, prior to the reduction of stamp duty in 1836, provincial newspapers cost around 7d; almost the equivalent cost of two loaves of bread.³ Although there were instances of lower-class readership, political commentary found on the pages of the Leeds press suggests that the average reader participated in local politics, whether as a voter or as an active supporter.⁴ Newspaper contents were arguably both

¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 8.

² Judy Lown, *Women and Industrialization: Gender at Work in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 178.

³ Donald Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities* (London: Arnold, 1961), 67; Janet E. Mullin, *Sixpence at Whist: Gaming and the English Middle Classes, 1680-1830* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 17.

⁴ In 1836, the reduction of stamp duty brought the price of an average provincial paper to about 4d making it more affordable. However, there is evidence that prior to 1836, workingmen pitched in small amounts of money to buy newspapers to share and visited coffee shops where the newspapers were often available for the public.

representative of the opinion of their readers, and exercised a certain degree of influence over them. However, whether newspapers are considered as a top-down enterprise or a crowd-drawn source, they were, undoubtedly, an essential part of middle-class culture. The inclusion of debates on criminal insanity points to the middle-class appeal of the press. The subject of criminal insanity was too complex for lower-class readers, who preferred inexpensive simply-phrased broadsides to newspapers.⁵

By 1830, the *Mercury* was the single most widely circulated, and arguably the most influential, provincial newspaper in Britain. The *Mercury* achieved its success as a result of Edward Baines' effective editorship and invention of editorial commentary, which, by the mid-nineteenth century, was adopted by most British newspapers. Baines, a campaigner for moderate political reform and, from 1834, an MP, made his newspaper known for its Whiggish editorial remarks. From 1801, when Baines took over the paper as both editor and a proprietor, and until his death in 1848, the *Mercury* promoted Baines' liberal political ideas on issues such as poverty and intemperance (i.e. alcoholism), assisting his rise in local, and, subsequently, national politics.⁶ Baines was also a dissenter and, unsurprisingly, the *Mercury* promoted the nonconformist evangelical ideas of its editor. Baines' evangelicalism might partly account for the paper's popularity as the dissenting communities, rather than an Anglican church, dominated Leeds.⁷

On the opposite end of the political and religious spectrum was the *Intelligencer*. With higher circulation than most provincial newspapers, it was the *Mercury*'s main local competition. The *Intelligencer* began as an independent conservative publication in 1754, but the increasing influence of the Whigs over both the local church and local politics during the early 1800s forced the *Intelligencer* to side with the working-class cause from an ultra-Tory, paternalist perspective. The *Intelligencer* was greatly inspired by Michael Sadler's *The Law of Population* (1830) as well as ultra-Tory Richard Oastler's factory reform campaigns. Sadler's work counteracted harsh Malthusian ideas, still supported by the *Mercury*, on the dangers of overpopulation, by arguing that the population increased in a diminishing ratio with an increased density; poor relief could, therefore, be given out generously.⁸ Both Sadler

Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850*, 205; Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 31.

⁵ Philippe Chassaing, 'Popular Representations of Crime: The Crime Broadside — a Subculture of Violence in Victorian Britain?', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 3, no. 2 (1 January 1999): 37.

⁶ Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850*, 108–136.

⁷ Clyde Binfield, *So down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity, 1780-1920* (London: Dent, 1977), 60.

⁸ Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850*, 181.

and Oastler spent much of their lives in Leeds and were regular contributors to the *Intelligencer*; their influence was arguably the strongest in West Yorkshire. The *Intelligencer*'s support of Sadler and Oastler ensured the *Intelligencer*'s fame as an ultra-Tory paper, as opposed to the moderately reformist *Mercury*.⁹ Unlike the *Mercury*, which protected the interests of Yorkshire manufacturers – the paper's main supporters – the *Intelligencer* attempted to unite the aristocracy and the lower classes against middle-class Leeds manufacturers and their Malthusian ideas.

Although early nineteenth-century newspapers did not usually identify authors, we can speculate that editors had a profound influence on what entered the pages of their newspapers. Editorials (Baines' innovation) offered political and social commentary specific to the views of the editor. However, editorial commentary was not restricted to columns that catered specifically for the editors' remarks (i.e. the main newspaper column usually entitled 'The Mercury' or 'Local Intelligence' etc.). Editorial commentary, that is to say the newspaper's own comments, was to an extent a part of most of the articles published.¹⁰ Remarks, often personal, concerning the papers' rivals suggest that much of this material was produced either by the editors themselves or someone in a high position within the editorial team.¹¹

For the most part, the press did not copy official crime reports without any alteration. Shorthand reporters who visited the courts in person recorded reports on Assizes (English periodic courts). In some instances, most likely in the case of the daily London papers, these reports were copied from rival newspapers.¹² Little research has been done in regards to the authorship of crime reports; however, most of the assize reports examined in this thesis were local and it is plausible that most of them were original commissions by the two leading Yorkshire publications. Similarly, coroners' reports on suicide made it onto the pages of newspapers with details added by unknown reporters. During an inquiry into a case of suspected suicide, coroners would produce a report in collaboration with a jury. According to

⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰ Papers' own contributions are particularly evident in the articles copied from London newspapers, most of which appear to retain the main body of the original articles, but contain additional commentaries at the beginning or the end of the article.

¹¹ Editorial commentaries reflected the *Mercury* and the *Intelligencer*'s differing political and social views quite explicitly. For instance, when the *Intelligencer* published an editorial attempting to side with the 'new' merchants and manufacturers, who were supported mainly by the Whigs, the *Mercury* referred to the rival's editorial as the 'three columns of trash' and 'the splendid folly'. *Leeds Intelligencer*, 9 November 1807; *Leeds Mercury*, 14 November 1807.

¹² Simon Devereaux, 'From Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Trial Reporting, the Nature of Crime, and the London Press, 1770–1800', *London Journal* 32, no. 1 (March 2007): 5.

Houston, coroners' reports contained 'literal facts' such as the description of the body and the circumstances of death. Houston justifies his decision to use newspaper reports of suicide, rather than these official counterparts, by pointing to the rich commentary, which appeared in newspapers on the moral, social and ethical context of suicide.¹³ However, it is impossible to know who produced this moral commentary. Unlike assize and suicide reports, articles in the 'Miscellany' section appear to be original works, often produced by medical professionals or governmental commissioners. It was the editor's choice to include these works, and newspapers occasionally doctored these articles by omitting some of their content.

This thesis examines the press coverage of insanity in West Yorkshire, and expands on previous research by looking at the three main representations of mental illness in the press; the assize reports featuring insanity cases, the suicide reports, and the 'Miscellany' articles on insanity. The purpose of this study is to uncover the social, political and moral values expressed in the discussions of insanity that appeared in weekly print. This thesis argues that the reports of insanity in the Leeds press were deliberately sensationalised and provided information reflective of readers' interests and concerns. It also argues that Leeds newspapers employed class-specific, moralistic language to portray insanity in a sympathetic yet detached manner. This thesis employs the early nineteenth-century meaning of sympathy, defined by Houston as a selective and contingent set of value judgements, specific to the contemporary classes, concerned with pity more so than with compassion.¹⁴

Conclusions in this research are drawn from an examination of ninety-two articles on criminal insanity, 376 suicide reports and thirty articles from the 'Miscellany' column sourced from the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury*. The textual analysis in this thesis focuses on articles containing the words 'insanity', 'lunacy', 'despondency', or phrases such as 'mental affliction', 'depression of spirits', 'nervous state', 'mental delusion' and 'grievous disease/disorder'. The search also implemented coded language – phrases such as 'horrid deed' and 'dreadful act' – for instances of criminal insanity in cases of child murder. Coded language for suicide – phrases such as 'fatal act' or 'sudden death' – especially in censored cases of respectable victims, were also used. 'Insanity' and 'lunacy' were the most effective search-terms, as they remained popular throughout the time scope of this project. The term 'madness', popular with historians of pre-twentieth-century mental illness, was used by

¹³ Houston asserts that the press selected suicide information from the coroners' reports, but does not speculate on how judicial information made it into print, see Rab Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 341.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 347.

medical practitioners for centuries prior to the medicalisation of insanity in the 1800s. During the late Georgian era, however, ‘madness’ remained a vernacular term for mental illness, while the educated classes used the newly implemented terms ‘insanity’ and ‘lunacy’. Insanity was vaguely defined by law and was a much more fluid concept than the modern notion of mental illness, and as such, was applied liberally to behaviour that deviated from the norms.

Medical historians and historians of mental illness tend to ignore the politically unstable late Georgian period situated in the cavity between the long reigns of King George III (1760–1820) and Queen Victoria (1837–1901).¹⁵ Yet it was during the late Georgian era that care for the mentally ill became known as psychiatry and was gradually established as a medical profession. George III’s insanity was a subject of concern throughout the kingdom; the papers published regular bulletins and updates on his health. Discussions on insanity started to gain momentum in 1800 when James Hadfield, presumed lunatic, attempted to assassinate George III, resulting in a trial that received unprecedented media attention. Historians consider Hadfield’s case to have caused subsequent legal reforms, which, in the view of contemporary society, popularised the insanity defence in criminal trials and increased the number of insane prisoners.¹⁶ The authorities were concerned about the general increase in insanity cases, demonstrated by the large number of pauper lunatics in the workhouses, which failed to provide adequate care. After decades of asylum reforms aimed at the protection of private, well-off, insane patients, in 1807 the House of Commons made inquiries into the conditions of confinement of pauper and criminal lunatics, recommending the construction of county asylums.¹⁷

Discussions of insanity and lunatic care reached their first peak in 1808 with the establishment of the County Asylums Act. Construction of asylums progressed slowly owing to the lack of local funds, and when a decade later, after extensive public debates, Yorkshire opened the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum, it was only the fifth of its kind in Britain. Yorkshire also housed the York Asylum, famous for propagating humane patient treatment in

¹⁵ This thesis defines late Georgian era as the Regency period and subsequent reign of George IV, and extending it to include the reign of William IV, ending in 1837.

¹⁶ For information on the increase of insanity see Richard Moran, ‘The Origin of Insanity as a Special Verdict: The Trial for Treason of James Hadfield (1800)’, *Law & Society Review* 19, no. 3 (1985): 488; for further arguments on the importance of the Hadfield trial see Arlie Loughnan, *Manifest Madness Mental Incapacity in the Criminal Law*, Oxford Monographs on Criminal Law and Justice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75; Moran, ‘The Origin of Insanity as a Special Verdict’.

¹⁷ The first statute to set the legal standards for asylum confinement was the Madhouses Act 1774; however, it included in its scope neither public asylums (institutions housing the pauper lunatics), nor the privately boarding lunatics.

the eighteenth century, as well as The Retreat, a pioneering institution of moral treatment. Thus, by 1818, West Yorkshire was at the forefront of mental health care and discussions of lunatic care were regularly the subject of leading articles in the Leeds press throughout the 1820s. Discussions of criminal insanity were particularly heated in the late 1820s, as the current Poor Laws were increasingly criticised. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 changed the way in which respectable print covered criminal insanity cases.¹⁸ The new laws, inspired by Malthusian ideas and the notion of ‘moral restraint’, limited poor relief and made workhouse conditions unappealing to discourage unemployment. The New Poor Law reduced the poor rates, which appealed to many ratepayers. Poverty began to be treated as crime, creating an illusion of control over the lower-class population, which is reflected in contemporary crime reports. However, the New Poor Law was also heavily criticised for its harshness by such reformers as Oastler.

The time scope of this thesis concludes in 1840, when the rise of Chartism triggered changes in class dynamics and altered the discourse of insanity. A new era in mental health treatment began when asylums gradually transformed into mental hospitals. The 1840s gave rise to what is commonly known as institutionalisation, when the state became more involved in the handling of insanity and treatments became more authoritarian. During the Victorian era, insanity was increasingly regarded as a physical as well as moral disease, which could be cured, rather than simply managed. Psychiatry became firmly established as a medical specialisation during early Victorian years, resulting in an increase of works concerning mental illness and the publication of the first British psychiatric journal, *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* (1848). As a result, many doctors began to specialise in specific gender and class treatments. Care for the insane became commercialised; as is clear from the 1840s and 1850s press, focus shifted towards addressing the problem of the lack of care for the middling respectable classes who were not covered by pauper care.

Poststructuralist studies dominated modern historiography of mental illness during the 1960s and 1970s. Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* (1964) and Thomas Szasz’s *The Manufacture of Madness* (1970) posed a radical challenge to the legitimacy of psychiatry by uncovering the oppressive authoritarian tendencies of psychiatric treatment. Both scholars

¹⁸ From hereon referred to as the New Poor Law.

essentially rejected mental illness as a concept, arguing that the idea of madness was cultivated in order to segregate those who were different, as well as for institutional profit.¹⁹

Although perhaps too extreme in its conclusions, early poststructuralist scholarship prompted historians to consider representations and misrepresentations of madness throughout history. Roy Porter was the first historian to focus on pre-nineteenth-century psychiatric treatments in his book *Mind Forg'd Manacles* (1987). In his study, Porter examines contemporary patient and doctor accounts and the language used to describe mental illness. He argues that apart from serving a diagnostic purpose, the language of insanity expressed moral and political values. Porter touched on the change in attitudes towards insanity reflected in the use of specific medical and social descriptions; for instance, the emergence of the 'nervous diseases' among the respected classes coincided with industrialisation and constituted both a malady and a mark of distinction for those for whom industrialisation brought profit.²⁰ Following Porter's influential work, Trevor Turner examined contemporary Victorian psychiatric terminology, comparing patient records from the Ticehurst House Asylum to modern diagnostic jargon.²¹

William Parry-Jones was the first historian to examine class-based treatments of insane patients. In his highly regarded *Trade in Lunacy* (1971), alongside traditional sources such as asylum records and medical accounts, Parry-Jones consulted asylum advertisements from contemporary medical directories. Analysis of public advertisements support Parry-Jones' argument that nineteenth-century private asylums were commercially driven, class divided institutions. While the idea of an economic class division is somewhat outdated, Parry-Jones' study proves that from at least the mid-eighteenth century, economic and social classification of asylum patients was an increasingly important aspect in British mental health care.²²

In recent years, historians of literature and art have begun to uncover historic representations of insanity outside of medical documentation and asylum records. Scholars

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilizations : A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Tavistock, 1971); Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Trevor H. Turner, *A Diagnostic Analysis of the Casebooks of Ticehurst House Asylum, 1845-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 84.

²¹ Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*; Turner, *A Diagnostic Analysis of the Casebooks of Ticehurst House Asylum, 1845-1890*.

²² William Llywelyn Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy: A Study of Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Studies in Social History (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971).

like Dolly MacKinnon and Jane Kromm have analysed representations of mental illness in visual media. While MacKinnon's study looks at the portrayal of institutionalised late nineteenth-century mental health patients in published engravings and photographs, Jane Kromm focuses on the images of public madness outside of institutions throughout the early modern period. In these works, insanity is considered both as a medical concept and a visual aesthetic. By looking at the way in which artists and illustrators portrayed madness, both Kromm and MacKinnon tease out contemporary ideas and feelings about mental illnesses and treatments. Kromm traces the public visual depictions of mania from its classical male form in the early modern period to its feminine interpretation as hysteria in the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ By looking at newspaper representation of asylum treatments, MacKinnon asserts that towards the end of the nineteenth century insanity was portrayed as a stereotypically violent expression.²⁴ Similarly, by exploring Charles Dickens' novel *Little Dorrit*, Lawrence Frank explores the literary portrayal of insanity. His work captures the Victorian fascination with insanity, reflected in its numerous literary appearances.²⁵

The press has been unjustly overlooked as a source on the portrayal of insanity. Traditionally, historians of mental illness constructed broad national overviews of insanity based on asylum documents, coroners' reports, and, occasionally, by looking at sporadic newspaper coverage. However, asylum documents offer limited insight into the way in which insanity was viewed outside medical institutions, and coroners' reports have survived only partially. Rab Houston's comparison of coroners' reports to press coverage of suicide reports in the same area reveal that coroners' reports survival is uneven, and that newspapers appear to offer a wider coverage.²⁶ Historians have occasionally used the press as evidence of nationwide public attitudes towards crime and suicide, but have failed to look at both criminal and suicidal insanity coverage in specific areas. Rab Houston's work on suicide penalties includes the first regional analysis of the newspaper coverage of Georgian suicide reports. Houston's microhistoric analysis of Scottish and Northumbrian suicide reports offers an account far more detailed than the brief nationwide overviews of crime or suicide offered by other historians. It shows that the press, the most important mass medium of the last half millennium, captured the way the public was informed about suicide, information that cannot

²³ Jane Kromm, *The Art of Frenzy: Public Madness in the Visual Culture, 1500-1850* (New York ; London: Continuum, 2002).

²⁴ Dolly MacKinnon, "'The Trustworthy Agency of the Eyes': Reading Images of Music and Madness in Historical Context', *Health and History* 5, no. 2 (1 January 2003): 123–49.

²⁵ Lawrence Frank, 'In Hamlet's Shadow: Mourning and Melancholia in *Little Dorrit*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 52, no. 4 (2012): 861–96.

²⁶ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 332.

be gathered from documents with narrower public outreach, such as asylum or coroners' records.²⁷

Few studies have considered the public representation of insanity during the late Georgian era. Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy's *Sleepless Souls* (1990), an overview of early modern suicide, uses newspaper reports to demonstrate an increase in secular, non-religious explanations for suicides, which were 'simply noticed or held up as objects of pity'.²⁸ However, MacDonald and Murphy's brief overview does not have a geographical focus, and looks at a sporadic selection of British titles. Rab Houston's final chapter in *Punishing the Dead* (2010) advances MacDonald and Murphy's research, focusing on northern Britain and exploring local urban and provincial suicide reporting. Houston presents evidence that suicide reports in Scotland and Northumberland expressed selective sympathy, reflected in detailed yet detached reports.²⁹ Additionally, Houston traces the differences in suicide reporting depending on the victims' gender and social rank, exploring the complexity of social tensions.³⁰

The gendering of insanity prior to the Victorian era remains a relatively unexplored subject, due to both the lack of sources and the historical preoccupation with Victorian and post-Victorian insanity. Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, a classic study on madness and gender between 1830 and 1950, remains the most detailed research on the topic. Since its publication in 1985, however, historians have criticised its rather one-sided and simplistic approach. Showalter argues that the nineteenth-century insanity was considered to be predominantly a female illness.³¹ More recently, sociologist Joan Busfield has suggested that the concept of male insanity is also applicable; however, her analysis of male insanity considers a very limited set of examples.³² Recently, David Barrie, a historian of criminal justice, has pointed out that gender norms were expressed through the reporting of 'shameful' behaviour. Barrie's analysis of trial reports in the nineteenth-century Scottish media shows

²⁷ Ibid., 325.

²⁸ Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*, Oxford Studies in Social History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 314.

²⁹ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*

³⁰ Ibid., 347.

³¹ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987).

³² Busfield focuses on questioning Showalter's work by providing three examples of male nineteenth-century insanity: 'mad genius', 'criminal lunatic' and 'masturbatory insanity'. These examples, in Busfield's words, 'by no means exhaust the list'. See Joan Busfield, 'The Female Malady? Men, Women and Madness In Nineteenth Century Britain', *Sociology* 28, no. 1 (1994): 261.

that the press used the subversion of social norms to define the middle-class idea of feminine and masculine conduct.³³

This thesis examines the way in which the two leading Yorkshire publications portrayed insanity and suicide between the 1808 County Asylums Act, which marked the start of the medicalisation of insanity, and 1840, when insanity became a part of a fully established psychiatric profession. It aims to uncover how these publications, influenced by some of the most powerful reformists and politicians of the time, such as Baines and Sadler, presented insanity to their middle-class readers. The chapter sections in this thesis are divided into three time periods. They begin in 1808 during the establishment of the new asylum reform, the progressing illness of King George III and shortly after the famous Hadfield trial of 1800, all of which encouraged public discussions of insanity. The second sections begin in 1818, following the establishment of the West Riding County Asylum in York, a landmark which frequently became the focus of the Leeds press reports. The period between 1818 and 1830 was also characterised by widespread concern about a supposed increase in the instances of insanity, which, at the time, was often attributed to poverty. The third time period begins with the publication of George Man Burrows' innovative work on suicide – *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Treatment, Moral and Medical, of Insanity* (1828), and ends in 1840. During this time there were notable differences between the reports in the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury*. The sudden emergence of Temperance Societies in many major British towns in the early 1830s resulted in the *Mercury*'s focus on intemperance as one of the main causes of suicidal behaviour, while the, increasingly ultra-Tory, *Intelligencer* reflected its affiliation with the anti-Poor Law movement in its reports of insanity.

The structure of this thesis mirrors the structure of the nineteenth-century newspaper, by first discussing assize reports, which made up the bulk of the print. The 'Assizes' column was followed by suicide reports, which, with the exception of the deaths of famous figures, were reported in the 'local' news section. Finally, the 'Miscellany' column, discussed in the third chapter, typically appeared on the last page of the newspaper. Chapter one focuses on legal cases that featured a verdict of insanity and explores the language used by the press in the reports of mainly violent domestic crime. Chapter two looks at suicide reports, the largest body of newspaper reporting of insanity, and considers how contemporary views on financial

³³ David G. Barrie, 'Naming and Shaming: Trial by Media in Nineteenth-Century Scotland', *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 2 (April 2015): 352.

and moral despondency influenced the portrayal of self-murder. Chapter three considers editorial articles that cannot otherwise be qualified as either crime or suicide reports. This chapter uncovers the presence of surprisingly humorous and entertaining articles on insanity found in editorials and the 'Miscellany' section of the newspapers, arguing that the portrayal of insanity by Leeds newspapers reflected peculiarly middle-class concerns and fears.

This thesis is the first comparative study of newspaper portrayal of criminal insanity, suicide and 'Miscellaneous' narratives of insanity published during the late Georgian era. It considers the extent to which portrayals of insanity in this period were sensationalised, moralistic, class-specific and gendered. It expands on previous research by uncovering the social, political and moral values expressed in crime and suicide reports and popular discussions of insanity. It argues that, like other affective material, the reports of insanity in the Leeds press were deliberately sensationalised. This thesis further contends that the press segregated the insane and employed class-specific, moralistic language. The newspapers were selectively sympathetic and detached, adopting a particular tone depending on the social status of the subjects under discussion. The Leeds press reports also gendered insanity, representing some instances of mental lapse as potentially threatening subversions of traditional gender norms.

Chapter One: Assize Reports

Newspapers dedicated a considerable amount of space to crime reports and were the most widely read source of printed information on crime and justice. Both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* dedicated approximately fifteen percent of the newspaper space to inquests and nearby assizes. The amount of space allocated depended on the issue. Occasionally, popular trials, such as the 1829 trial of Jonathan Martin, a ‘lunatic’ who set fire to York Minster, would take up around twenty-five percent of the newspaper. The reading public was concerned and fascinated with crime, and, in particular, crime that featured the verdict of insanity. Leeds newspapers offered their readers extensive assize and inquest coverage of cases of criminal insanity, and reporters often selected sensational details to include in their articles.

The details provided by the press also served the purpose of socialising readers. As Philippe Chassaigne suggests in his study of crime broadsides, crime reports, by including entertainment as well as educational detail that the group could understand and relate to, aimed to connect members of the same social group, attempting to induce a sense of belonging.¹ Gruesome details, according to Chassaigne, inspired collectively experienced feelings like horror, repulsion and compassion.² At the beginning of the nineteenth century British weekly and daily newspapers started to copy the way in which broadsides reported crime and by the 1850s they had replaced broadsides as the most popular printed source for crime. The popularity of broadsides among the lower classes in the first half of the nineteenth century was owing to their price; the readership of an average sixpence provincial weekly paper in the early 1800s was predominantly middle-class. The educational and entertaining details found in the Leeds press between 1808 and 1840 were probably aimed at a more educated and financially better-off audience. Chassaigne points out that cases of criminal insanity did not attract much attention from broadsides, as their readers would have found the subject too complex.³

Scholarship on representations of crime in the nineteenth-century press has shown that newspapers preferred to report on violent cases. Peter King, a prominent historian of crime, found that late-eighteenth-century London newspapers favoured violent crime cases

¹ Chassaigne, ‘Popular Representations of Crime’, 40.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 37.

and included a considerable amount of harrowing detail in their victim-centric reports.⁴ These reports often focused on unsolved crime that violated either a person or a property, creating concern and tension in readers.⁵ Throughout the 1790s and during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, London crime reports, according to King, were becoming more police- and court-centric, which meant that assize reports were more likely to present authorities in a more favourable light. King suggests that court-centric reporting also meant that the amount of gory details has subsided by 1820.⁶ However, an examination of the Leeds press reports of the cases featuring an insanity defence indicates the opposite trend; the 1820s campaigns for poor reform as an anti-infanticide measure ensured that the press religiously reported the worst child murder cases as scandal. While King provides an extensive amount of primary data on the types and locations of offences published in the London press, he does not speculate on the reasons behind the inclusion of selected reports on crime. Bridget Walsh, in her study on nineteenth-century domestic murder, suggests that gruesome crime details were added as factual, even medical, information. That way the papers could include details that were both factually accurate and emotionally affecting, while avoiding accusations of having deliberately sensationalised their reports.⁷

By the 1820s, sensational material had become a vital part of a provincial newspaper. Historians of criminal insanity avoid using the term ‘sensational’ to describe articles containing gore, sexual scandal or other dramatic details as sensationalism is assumed to have reached the British press only by the end of the nineteenth century.⁸ However, articles on political or upper-class scandal were featured in the press as early as the 1740s and 50s and were sensational in their content.⁹ Moreover, publications containing gore and horror were popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century.¹⁰

Perry Curtis, in his work on the coverage of the Jack the Ripper murders, states that before the rise of the ‘new journalism’, and subsequently sensationalism, in the 1860s,

⁴ Peter King, ‘Newspaper Reporting and Attitudes to Crime and Justice in Late-Eighteenth- and Early-Nineteenth-Century London’, *Continuity and Change* 22, no. 1 (May 2007): 102.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷ Bridget Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England: Literary and Cultural Representations* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 21.

⁸ Anne-Marie Kilday, a historian of infanticide, refers to the publication of reports that contributed to the moral panic about infanticide as ‘scaremongering’ rather than sensationalising, see Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain: C. 1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 119.

⁹ Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.

¹⁰ L. Perry Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 68.

newspapers aimed to publish any instance of violence or gore.¹¹ One of the reasons for the inclusion of such articles in respectable titles was competition with inexpensive Grub Street ‘shilling shockers’ which, unlike most newspapers, were more affordable. Curtis suggests that the public enjoyed gore for its own sake, rather than as a diversion from the horrors of England’s unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation. After all, horror was not confined to print: Madam Tussaud often displayed wax figures of the famous murderers after bringing her wax figure collection to London in 1802. Public displays of anatomical curiosities were also popular, as were theatrical productions of sensation novels, such as the ones by May Braddon and Wilkie Collins.¹² As Curtis demonstrates, the term ‘sensational’ is entirely applicable to gore and scandalous material published throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though newspapers did not deliberately sensationalise reports of crimes committed by those presumed insane until later in the nineteenth century, articles containing sensational material were popular. These sensational articles display many similarities to the broadsides examined by Chassaingne, designed not only to entertain, but to provide moral lessons.

Indeed, another feature of reports on an insanity defence traced by historians, in particular for infanticide, was their moralising nature. While both King and Chassaingne refer to the presence of moralistic detail in the early nineteenth century, the majority of historians tend to focus on the ‘moral panic’ of the 1860s and 70s.¹³ Annie Cossins, historian of female criminality, and Anne-Marie Kilday, historian of infanticide, attribute moralistic newspaper accounts of the 1860s to a heightened sensationalism.¹⁴ The way in which newspapers fuelled the moral panic was by providing ‘grave, moral lessons...voyeuristic excitement and titillation’, criticising the poor, and in particular ‘fallen women’.¹⁵ As newspapers overtook broadsides as the main source for information on crime by the 1850s, their reports of criminal insanity became more sensationalist. The traits described by Cossins, however, can also be traced in the newspapers from the early 1800s. According to Nicola Goc, during the decade

¹¹ Ibid., 67.

¹² Ibid., 79.

¹³ Scandalous baby farming cases created a media-driven moral panic during the 1860s and 70s, prompting legal and medical authorities to investigate the statistics of infant mortality, which heightened the concern about female morality. See Ruth Ellen Homrighaus, ‘Wolves in Women’s Clothing: Baby-Farming and the British Medical Journal, 1860-1872’, *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 3 (1 July 2001): 351.

¹⁴ Annie Cossins, *Female Criminality: Infanticide, Moral Panics and the Female Body* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 109; Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain*, 95.

¹⁵ Cossins, *Female Criminality*, 52, 106.

leading up to the New Poor Law of 1834, the *Times* used news of infanticide to promote campaigns for Poor Law reform.¹⁶

Examination of criminal insanity cases published in the Leeds press shows that insanity was portrayed as both feminine and masculine malady. Few scholars have considered masculine insanity during the late-Georgian period. In her article on gender and insanity in nineteenth-century Britain, sociologist Joan Busfield argues against the idea of insanity as a manifestation of the feminine, propagated by Showalter's classic work. Busfield states that, in fact, there were a number of essentially male types of insanity, which did not imply an adaptation of feminine traits by the males.¹⁷ However, Busfield suggests only three types of male insanity, namely that of a 'mad genius', 'criminal lunatic' and 'masturbatory insanity'.¹⁸ The numerous studies conducted on female criminality focus on infanticide and the moral panic that surrounded the issue during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Female insanity appears to have been shaped by the woman's expected role as a wife and a mother, as any transgressions from this standard were highlighted by the press. However, as the campaigns for Poor Law reform began in the early 1820s, female insanity was increasingly portrayed as a lower-class issue. Acquittal on the grounds of insanity was reserved to violent cases involving either murder or assault. A great proportion of these crimes were domestic, often involving children, and featured cases of insane poor or servant women who had transgressed their gender norms. Reports on male criminal insanity focused on problems traditionally associated with male gender, such as financial trouble, religious fanaticism, eccentricity and, increasingly, intemperance. Male criminal lunatics were also more likely to be portrayed as 'dangerous', while female cases were discussed in a paternalistic tone.

While the 1860s moral panic was a widespread phenomenon, publicised in specialist medical journals as well as across a range of newspapers, moral lessons provided in the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* in the first half of the nineteenth century catered to a specific audience. Were these newspapers trying to improve the morals of the audience? Or were the middle classes attempting to separate and establish themselves by providing moralistic accounts of crimes committed by the lower classes? Another question arises when one

¹⁶ Nicola Goc, *Women, Infanticide, and the Press, 1822-1922: News Narratives in England and Australia* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 23.

¹⁷ Busfield, 'The Female Malady?', 269.

¹⁸ Jill Newton Ainsley, "'Some Mysterious Agency': Women, Violent Crime, and the Insanity Acquittal in the Victorian Courtroom", *Canadian Journal of History* 35, no. 1 (April 2000): 39; Busfield, 'The Female Malady?', 261.

considers the cases of criminal insanity as opposed to media representations of crime in general, the focus of the scholars mentioned above. In its novelty and complexity, was criminal insanity an exceptional topic? Between 1808 and 1840, the idea of insanity as debated in the courts was disputed and constantly evolving, and, during these years, it experienced a legal and a medical transformation. Considering an increased awareness of and interest in the subject, could insanity have been a topic of curiosity for educated readers?

Murders and attempted murders made up the majority of reporting on criminal insanity. Considering that theft was a principal offence throughout the nineteenth century, constituting approximately 90 percent of all prosecutions during the time frame of this thesis, the predominance of murder and attempted murder trials in these research findings indicates an interest in or concern with violent crime.¹⁹ The Leeds press chose to forefront political murder and attempted murder, a type of crime that produced the most sensation during the first half of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the years between 1818 and 1834. During the latter period, Leeds newspapers took every opportunity to publish the most violent reports on child murder and infanticide, as middle- and upper-class campaigns for the New Poor Law took centre stage in press reports throughout the country. There was generally a bias towards the selection of domestic murder trials, as reports on domestic murder make up 74 percent of the articles examined in this thesis. Following the example set by the *Times*, prior to the New Poor Law of 1834, the Leeds newspapers used articles on lower-class domestic violence, in particular infanticide, to highlight the moral danger of illegitimate births. A Malthusian-informed critique of the lower classes was central to the greater majority of the reports on criminal insanity, and the press implied that the lack of proper moral behaviour and upbringing was at its core. These dramatic, at times gory, articles projected middle-class moral values and gendered criminal insanity. The Leeds press reports also show an interest in insanity as a legal defence and, in the 1830s, a concern about its implementation in the courts.

1808 – 1818

Discussions on the insanity of criminals entered the media in 1800, when James Hadfield attempted to assassinate George III, and were further intensified following the widely

¹⁹ Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (Harlow; New York: Longman, 2010), 57.

publicised King's illness. Hadfield's trial caused an unprecedented amount of attention, prompting the 1800 Criminal Lunatics Act. As a result, gaols received an increasing number of insane prisoners, to be confined long term. Confinement of insane criminals, as well as overfilled workhouses keeping mentally ill in inadequate conditions, forced the government to form a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1807 in order to devise a plan for the removal of the insane from gaols. As a result, parliament passed the 1808 County Asylums Act, which, instead of focusing on a cure, forced counties to provide asylums for the imprisoned and otherwise confined insane. Discussions on the confinement of the insane, as well as on funding of the asylums, reached every part of the country, and in Yorkshire resulted in the approval of building plans for West Riding County Asylum in 1815. The early 1800s marked a new period in discussion on criminal insanity, as public concern was raised by the famous Hadfield trial and the subsequent Lunatic Acts. The Yorkshire discussions reached a new level of interest after 1818, when the West Riding County Asylum was opened, and its superintendent, Dr William Charles Ellis, became a prolific, outspoken figure on British asylum care for the insane.²⁰

Sensational articles published between 1808 and 1818 were mainly of a political nature. The assassination of Spencer Perceval in 1812 and an attempted murder of Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, in 1818 received a considerable amount of coverage. Both cases triggered discussions regarding the nature and viability of insanity as a defence in court. After John Bellingham, Perceval's assassin, was executed, the *Mercury* published an article in Bellingham's defence, citing his past experiences and behaviour during and after the assassination as a sign of the 'clearest cases of insanity'.²¹ In 1818, the *Intelligencer* published a number of articles on insanity concerning Lieutenant Davies, who attempted to assassinate Henry John Temple.²² Temple himself defended Davies on the grounds that his attacker was of unsound mind. In both Bellingham and Davies' cases, the newspapers emphasised presumed medical conditions of the attackers, rather than possible or apparent political grievances behind these attacks, as both cases occurred during socially unstable years. Shortly after the European revolutionary wave of 1830, a similar fearful portrayal of political crime ensued when the Leeds press emphasised medical conditions of

²⁰ During his career at the West Riding Asylum, Ellis compiled a treatise on the treatment of insanity and regularly participated in the mental health care reform discussions in the Leeds press, ultimately receiving a knighthood for his pioneering therapeutic work. See William Charles Ellis, *A Treatise on the Nature, Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment of Insanity* (London: S. Holdsworth, 1838).

²¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 23 May 1812.

²² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 April, 25 May 1818.

the perpetrators instead of their possible political agenda, suggesting that the newspapers were concerned about political radicalism.

Leeds newspapers did not mention infanticide or child murder in relation to insanity before 1818, when the concern for child murder started to increase. Instead, the press chose to publish moralistic accounts of domestic violence and murder. The 1814 murder of Jane Ware by her lover Mr Hack was popular among the newspapers. The *Mercury* article described their affair in detail, hinting at the multiple pregnancies experienced by Ware and condemning the affair by stating that Hack ‘was at that time married, and had three children’.²³ Moreover, Mrs Hack was said to have been kind towards Ware, despite being aware of the affair that took place.²⁴ The *Mercury* exposed both the immoral behaviour of the husband as well as, apparently, the immoral behaviour of his wife who had failed to interfere. However, the paper sympathised with Ware, an ‘unfortunate young woman’ who was portrayed as a helpless victim. The article ended with the ultimate punishment for moral transgression – Mr Hack’s irritation ‘terminated the existence of both’ him and his lover. In the 1810s family was already central to the middle-class idea of morality. Anna Clark argues that family virtues were central to middle-class politics from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with middle-class patriotism based on morality, family and love of Britain.²⁵ The accused in the 1814 case, as well as in the case of John Stater of the same year, who was charged with bigamy and found insane, were not identified as belonging to any particular social class, but could be presumed to have been of a middling rank as they were in possession of servants. Moralising articles published after 1818 by contrast tended to focus on either lower-class criminals or young, therefore foolish, middle-class men and women.

Before 1818, most reports on criminal insanity displayed an interest in the subject; the language associated with mental illness was quite descriptive and the press appears to be interested in the reasons behind criminals’ insanity. Newspapers included descriptions of the state of the criminal’s health prior to the crime and, occasionally, if an insanity defence failed, during the execution. In 1812, a year after George III’s final attack of insanity, a Middlesex murderer, Thomas Bowler, was executed, despite being pronounced a lunatic by a medical professional.²⁶ The *Mercury* wrote that ‘he seemed throughout perfectly tranquil; as

²³ *Leeds Mercury*, 10 September 1814.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Clark, *Scandal*, 147.

²⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 29 August 1812.

if unmindful of the fate...a kind of stupor apparently benumbed his feelings'.²⁷ In the same year, the *Mercury* methodically defended Perceval's assassin, claiming that the 'atrociousness of the crime, the want of any adequate motive, the composure of the assassin, his uniform, and no doubt sincere approval of his horrid act...all concur in pointing out insanity'.²⁸ The King's much publicised mental health problems, as well as greater awareness and concern with insanity, could have provoked the *Mercury*'s obvious interest in the insanity defence. Moreover, by defending Perceval's assassin, the *Mercury* questioned the official verdict, which, according to King, was not unusual before crime reports became more favourable in their depiction of authorities in the 1820s.

Both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* were anxious to find the reasons behind a criminal's insanity. Samuel Davey's fit of insanity, for example, was a result of 'deficiency of labour', while William Whitehead's derangement was a hereditary condition.²⁹ The public was increasingly anxious about insanity, fearing a rise in cases after witnessing an increasing trend in asylum-building after the County Asylums Act came into effect. While in the eighteenth century insanity was legally explained as a 'total want of memory and reason', linking human to a beast, in the early 1800s the medical and legal authorities began to question whether an individual's mind (inner thoughts and feelings) and body (the way victims looked and behaved) were as interlinked as previously thought.³⁰ An old belief that a person's past dictated their behaviour in the future was challenged by a notion of momentary derangement, when the perpetrator was 'not himself'. Such portrayal of criminals posed a challenge to the existing legal system and posed a threat to the public. Anxiety about the insanity defence was also reflected in the widely publicised cases of individuals who pretended to have suffered from insanity in order to benefit from local charity, such as John Crouch who was reported by both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* to have pretended to be insane in order to collect charity money for his family of four.³¹

Between 1808 and 1818 the Leeds press reports show criminal insanity as a predominantly male illness. As there were only two cases of female criminal insanity published prior to 1818, the data does not allow definite conclusions about gender and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 23 May 1812.

²⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 17 June 1809; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 July 1817.

³⁰ Joel Peter Eigen, 'Lesion of the Will: Medical Resolve and Criminal Responsibility in Victorian Insanity Trials', *Law & Society Review* 33, no. 2 (1 January 1999): 427; Joel Peter Eigen, 'Sense and Sensibility: Fateful Splitting in the Victorian Insanity Trial' in *Domestic and International Trials, 1700-2000: The Trial in History, Volume 2*, ed. R. A. Melikan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 25.

³¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 February 1816; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 February 1816.

insanity. In the case of male perpetrators, most were charged with violent crimes, but the records also included cases of bigamy, robbery, arson and financial fraud. Most men were acquitted on the grounds of insanity; only in three out of fifteen male cases recorded by the Leeds press, the men were pronounced guilty. From this data very few conclusions can be made, except the obvious novelty of the legal acquittal on the grounds of insanity – later periods do not contain such a variety of crimes, and acquittal on the grounds of insanity after 1818 was used only for violent cases.

1818 – 1834

The opening of the West Riding Asylum in 1818 and its subsequent admission of a large number of inmates received a lot of media attention, as did the attempted murder of Viscount Palmerston of the same year. From 1818, articles on criminal insanity started to focus more on sensational and moralistically rich material. Between 1818 and 1834, the focus of the Leeds press crime reports featuring an insanity defence was mainly on domestic crime, in particular child murder. These were the most sensational reports, and their content did not necessarily need to be altered in order to be sensational. A criminal's class and moral state, regarded as intertwined, became the focus of the majority of articles. Rather than simply displaying an interest in the subject of insanity, articles published between 1818 and the early 1830s focused on the causes and tried to re-enact the crimes committed. These reports also demonstrate a rising trend in 'othering' the insane and detaching them from the reader. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 effectively made mothers financially responsible for their illegitimate children, with no right to assign a father, leaving many in need to join the workhouse. Authorities and activists hoped that the new laws would discourage women from immoral behaviour. Contrary to King's assertion that by 1820 the press representation of crime became less dramatic, the reporting of criminal insanity in the Leeds press suggests that the period from 1818 to 1834 can be characterised as the first moral panic about infanticide, aided by the press with the use of affecting, dramatic detail.

Leeds newspapers took every opportunity to publish the most violent reports on child murder and infanticide. Both the *Mercury* and the *Intelligencer* reported a number of detailed child murder accounts throughout the 1820s. These records display violence seldom found in adult murder/assault trials. For example, the *Intelligencer* reported a man named Bean, a

wheelwright, who ‘almost severed [his children’s] heads from their bodies with a razor’.³² Likewise, the *Mercury* devoted a large proportion of the article on the murder of a small child by his father William Dewhirst to a discussion concerning the physical state of the child as he was found. The physician who discovered the boy’s body reported that he was ‘repeatedly dashed against a wall’ and had ‘bruises on the back of its head, and most of the hair appeared to have been dragged off’.³³ The detail was inserted not only to prove that the defendant was insane, but also to demonstrate that the paper was factually accurate. Mainly, however, the gory details attracted the audience and helped the press to avoid accusations of deliberate exaggeration, a technique described by Walsh and apparently popular with the *Times*.³⁴ The papers could not be blamed for misrepresentation, as the details provided were quite factual and, often, medical.

From 1818, reports on domestic murder and attempted murder were becoming increasingly common. Approximately half of these were reports on infanticide and child murder published from the early 1820s to 1834. As the *Times* began to advocate Poor Law reform in regards to the Bastardy Clause in 1822, the regional press had joined the cause.³⁵ Rather than moralising to middle-class readers, the Leeds press segregated the less respectable classes, encouraged by the contemporary Malthusian ideas that placed the blame for poverty on the lack of morals displayed by the poor. The middle-class press, led by the *Times*, wanted the lower classes to be discouraged from immoral behaviour; thus, the campaign for New Poor Laws ensued. Nicola Goc argues that between 1822 and 1834, the *Times* used articles on working-class infanticide to highlight the moral danger of, mainly, illegitimate births, and to suggest that women should be discouraged from such immoral behaviour.³⁶ The moralistic language segregated rather than educated the lower classes as the lower-class individuals could not afford these papers.

A Malthusian critique of the lower classes, which implied that lack of proper moral behaviour and upbringing was at the core of criminal insanity, was inherent in the contemporary press. Newspaper reporting of domestic murder was critical of the lower classes even if there were no explicit mentions of class as a player in these cases.³⁷ In 1825, the *Intelligencer* stated that the murderer Sarah Blackburn ‘usually goes without bonnet and

³² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 May 1820.

³³ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 November 1824.

³⁴ Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England*, 21.

³⁵ Goc, *Women, Infanticide, and the Press, 1822-1922*, 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁷ Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England*, 20.

cap; is in an unsound state of mind, and cannot distinguish between right and wrong'.³⁸ By pointing to Blackburn's unadorned head, the paper suggested that the woman lacked morals and respectability. During the late Georgian period – an era of reform and radicalism – many feared the prospect of a lower-class uprising. As a result, poverty had negative connotations and was associated with crime. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the two main Yorkshire publications, both sponsored and owned by individuals from the middle classes, published material that appeased the middle-class ranks.

The details provided were vivid and the reports were concerned with insanity as an illness and as a method of defence. Anne Palmer, the *Intelligencer* reported, 'committed the dreadful act' out of insanity driven by 'poverty and grief'.³⁹ Labourer Archibald McLellan was said to have had a deranged mind before he committed a 'horrid deed', and his child's body was found 'shockingly mangled'.⁴⁰ Such phrases as 'horrid deed' and 'dreadful act' were synonyms of child murder, so much so that Goc, for her study of the depiction of infanticide in the *Times*, used such phrases as coded language for infanticide among her search terms.⁴¹ All child murder cases also had a title, a rare feature in newspapers published before 1830, as the bulk of the crime reports was printed under 'Local Intelligence' or 'Assizes' column. 'Shocking Occurrence', 'Affecting Case' and 'Horrid Murder' were some of the most popular titles. The language used in these titles and in crime descriptions indicated shock and concern for the criminal behaviour; gory, sensational details reassured the readers of the defendant's insanity. Insanity, as the only excuse for child murder, was a part of the culture of sensibility, which felt that there were no sensible, or, sane, explanations for extreme violence. It was believed that the symptoms of insanity described in these trials revealed immorality in its severest form, and were often supported by other morally incriminating evidence, for example, the victim being a bastard child, in which case the crime was committed out of shame.⁴²

In domestic murder cases, female criminals were repeatedly blamed for transgressing gender norms. While male criminals' marital status was seldom stated, except in the cases of domestic crime, most instances of female criminal insanity stated the marital status of the perpetrator, which highlighted her expected role as a wife and a mother. For example, Martha Millus was charged with assaulting her husband to whom she had been 'married for 15 years,

³⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 April 1825.

³⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 July 1823.

⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 24 June 1826.

⁴¹ Goc, *Women, Infanticide, and the Press, 1822-1922*, 28.

⁴² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 December 1823.

and had had eight children'.⁴³ In another instance, an unnamed woman was said to have committed murder 'in the absence of her husband', presenting the perpetrator with an identity of a wife.⁴⁴ Both cases reinforced the idea of the female role in the domestic sphere.

Similarly to female cases, male insane criminals were portrayed as having transgressed their gender norms; however, contrary to traditional feminist thought, male insanity was not a feminine disease. Busfield argues that there was a peculiarly nineteenth-century concept of male criminal insanity, but suggests only one such malady – a male insanity linked to homicide, where the verdict of insanity was based on the violence perpetrated.⁴⁵ The examination of the cases of male insanity published in the Leeds press between 1818 and 1834 show that violence was not necessarily the decisive factor in the verdict of insanity. While female insanity was normally attributed to personal reasons, as in the case of suicidal insanity, male insanity was more likely to be attributed to moral issues, such as financial trouble and intemperance, and further to eccentricity and religious fanaticism. None of these issues can be identified as feminine; however, the loss of control itself could have been seen as a feminine trait. The belief that men were naturally more in control than women suggests that most forms of insanity were considered, to some extent, feminine.

Nevertheless, the most common triggers of insanity – financial trouble, intemperance, eccentricity and religious fanaticism – were considered masculine. Financial trouble and intemperance, ideas which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, were, for the most part problems associated with the male gender. Nineteenth-century eccentricity was also confined mainly to men, and was rarely noticed in women.⁴⁶ Religion, in turn was seen as a method of rationalisation and social order, characteristics that were highly masculine.⁴⁷ The feminine image of insanity is therefore applicable to cases of male criminal insanity only in part, when the perpetrator's loss of control was implied. In Barrie's words, the press reflected and defined 'middle-class parameters of acceptable feminine and masculine conduct'.⁴⁸ By discussing criminal insanity, the newspaper effectively revealed the subversion of gender norms.

⁴³ Ibid., 2 September 1822.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4 December 1820.

⁴⁵ Busfield, 'The Female Malady?', 273.

⁴⁶ James Gregory, "'Local Characters': Eccentricity and the North-East in the Nineteenth Century', *Northern History* 42, no. 1 (1 March 2005): 172–173.

⁴⁷ Lown, *Women and Industrialization*, 178.

⁴⁸ Barrie, 'Naming and Shaming', 352.

Details and speculations on the causes of insanity remained a constant feature after 1818. For example, the *Mercury*'s account of Joseph Mason's trial for the murder of his brother mentioned that 'among other extravagances he professed to build a joiner's shop, with bricks, movable from one place to another'.⁴⁹ The murderer also 'asserted his head had been split into two, and his brains taken out, and laid upon a plate' and that his sister 'drew his spirit from him'.⁵⁰ Newspapers also used physical descriptions of the accused after the trial, to reinforce the verdict of insanity. Insane criminals were most commonly portrayed, either as violent or sedated, described as 'wild and unsettled' and 'fanatical'.⁵¹ The defendants appeared unaware of either their illness or of the verdict. In Mason's trial report, the *Mercury* demonstrated lack of awareness by stating that before being removed from the bar, Mason asked for a further discussion, and that he had 'summoned all the persons who owed him money to appear, and he wished to have his cause heard by them'.⁵² The court then promised that he 'would have an opportunity, hereafter, of explaining all these matters', highlighting the absurdity of Mason's comments.⁵³ At the time medical professionals started to examine both the conduct and the physical appearance of insane patients, as inner structures of thought and feeling were thought to have a sustained connection with appearance and conduct. A description of a patient's physical state was therefore providing readers with visual cues as to what the insane person was like, which was a new advance in mental health medicine during the 1820s.⁵⁴

Reporters used melodramatic, theatrical detail to enclose insanity in a fictional framework, making it a part of a romanticised narrative, which allowed readers to consume affecting reports without feeling implicated. Bridget Walsh argues that Victorian domestic crime discussions were dramatised in print and presented as a narrative, rather than as a regular criminal report.⁵⁵ Reports studied by Walsh were presented as a narrative to a greater extent than the trials discussed in this section. However, from 1818 onwards, the Leeds press reports on criminal insanity were increasingly exhibiting many of the characteristics of

⁴⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 24 March 1821.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 8-15 April 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, 9 March 1822, 14 June, 23 August and 15 November 1828.

⁵² *Leeds Mercury*, 24 March 1821.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Work conducted by a highly regarded physician, Sir Alexander Morison, was one of the first British publications on insanity to include case illustrations. For the earliest published example of Morison's illustrated lectures, see Alexander Morison, *Outlines of Lectures on Mental Diseases With Thirteen Engravings*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1826).

⁵⁵ Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England*, 21.

theatricality discussed by Walsh. The report on the child murderer Archibald McLellan, for instance, described the mother's suffering: 'her state may be more easily conceived than described, on hearing the dying groans of her child suffering under the hands of a remorseless parent'.⁵⁶ The report then described the rest of the scene as the neighbours found it, turning their witness testimony into a tale of horror. In such a theatrical depiction each participant in the trial had a role; the murderer was usually portrayed as the villain. When in 1828 an unnamed woman attempted to assassinate a well-known local gentleman, the *Mercury* described her as a 'wretched looking woman' who rushed into the hotel where the gentleman was staying and 'made a desperate lunge...with a weapon resembling an oyster knife!'.⁵⁷ The paper then said that the woman was no doubt 'another *Peg Nicholson* (i.e. Margaret Nicholson who famously tried to assassinate King George III in 1786 with a dessert knife) and either drunk or insane', creating a comic theatrical report.⁵⁸

Public anxiety about insanity may have lessened after 1818, as some reports displayed sustained sympathy with the criminal. The *Intelligencer* commented that Anne Palmer, who committed infanticide out of poverty and grief, was an 'unfortunate woman... passionately fond of the deceased babe'.⁵⁹ Similarly, the paper sympathised with George Thomas who had 'no delight in any thing[sic] except his children' and offered no resistance when he was asked to go to prison on account of the murder of his child. Prior to the 'unfortunate affair', Thomas was 'a man remarkable for his cheerfulness and vivacity of disposition'.⁶⁰ The most startling example was the report on the trial of John Wright. The *Intelligencer* described Wright as an 'unhappy man' whose wife had recently eloped. He attempted to drown his child once before succeeding and upon seeing his dead child, Wright 'knelt on the body, and kissed it with great apparent affection'.⁶¹ The *Intelligencer* declared that 'the strong affection displayed by the prisoner for his unfortunate child, and his frantic expressions on the loss of his wife, were brought forward in such a simple but touching manner, that their[sic] was scarcely[sic] a dry eye in the Court' and even the Judge was 'overpowered by his feelings'.⁶² While the dramatic details drew in the readers, words such as 'the unhappy man' or 'the unfortunate woman' show an awareness of the mental condition suffered or presumed to have been suffered by

⁵⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 24 July 1826.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 June 1828.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 July 1823.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1824.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2 April 1821.

⁶² *Ibid.*

these criminals.⁶³ While articles featuring insanity were widely available – indeed, they were of interest to the public – newspapers made the topic safe to enjoy by using appropriate language codes and adopting melodramatic style in crime reports that featured insanity.

1834 – c.1840

Extensive discussions and campaigns by asylum superintendents, among them Dr Ellis, saw successive Madhouse Acts in 1828 and 1832 aimed at improving the treatment of patients and the asylum licencing system. However, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act made the biggest impact on press portrayal of criminal insanity. Although unpopular with the lower classes, the New Poor Law, with a strict clause for unmarried mothers, must have had a calming influence on the middle classes, since the number of child murder case reports did not increase. Longer articles now tended to focus on sensational murder and assault cases of national fame, rather than on domestic or child murders. During the 1830s, newspapers were also starting to take over broadsides as the most popular printed sources on crime. Some of the socialising techniques used by the broadsides to report crime were implemented in the Leeds press reports on criminal insanity; however, the focus of middle-class papers was still quite different to that of popular inexpensive literature. Newspaper reports now displayed the fear of the disease, rather than the curiosity in insanity traced in earlier periods.

The main sensational articles on criminal insanity published after 1828 exposed concern about possible political uprisings rather than moral panic on domestic crime. The biggest criminal insanity case was that of ‘Sir’ William Courtenay (real name – John Nichols Tom) reported by the *Intelligencer* in 1838. Courtenay, ‘a madman – a lunatic – who ought never to have had his liberty’, caused a riot in the county of Kent by organising about a dozen peasants to help him ‘recover his property’.⁶⁴ The rioters and their ‘eccentric’ leader, whose behavior was destructive to the locals, had to be violently stopped by police, resulting in deaths on both sides. The report described the lunatic’s erratic, insane behavior at length, emphasising his ‘eccentricity’ and lunacy, as opposed to Courtenay’s political ideas or the fact that he received a considerable support from the local laborers. Courtenay’s case

⁶³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 May 1820, 2 April 1821, 24 July 1823 and 8-15 April 1824; *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1829.

⁶⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 9 June 1838.

resembles the depiction of Bellingham and Temple discussed earlier, suggesting the unwillingness of the Leeds press to diverge into radicalism.

Child murder and infanticide reports contained less gory detail after 1834, as the anxiety about lower-class immorality had subsided. Domestic crime was now less dramatised, but the press still used its sensational value in affecting headings; for example: ‘Shocking Matricide’, ‘Child Murder’ – these articles were lengthy and affecting, but no longer gory; their focus was on a moral message about domestic crime.⁶⁵ The titles implied that the defendant was morally wrong before presenting the case, unlike the earlier titles that simply drew attention to the article. Such new sensationalist use of article titles reinforced the moral message that the newspapers wanted to send, exposing the destruction of traditional, respectable relationships, such as the one between a mother and her child in the case of the *Intelligencer*’s ‘Shocking Matricide’.⁶⁶ Moreover, the paper reiterated the title by adding ‘a Woman Murdered by her Son’ in smaller font.⁶⁷

During the 1830s, the Leeds press started to also focus on the intemperance of the lower classes. An article on the assault of John Turnpenny by his son Samuel in 1837, presented the crime as a result of the intoxication of both parties who had ‘been all day at different public houses’.⁶⁸ In the same year, the *Intelligencer* published an account of a murder committed by Joseph Farmer, who was said to have laboured under *delirium tremens*.⁶⁹ The sudden emergence of these articles proves that the newly launched temperance movement had an influence on the media, which, as the next chapter will show, was even more apparent in the suicide cases of the 1830s. The largely middle-class evangelical movement was important to the *Mercury*, whose proprietor was a dedicated evangelical dissenter, and was less pronounced in the *Intelligencer*’s reports, as some of the main Tory supporters in England were the principal brewers.⁷⁰

After the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in 1834, the Leeds press continued to address the subversion of gender and class norms. Female cases were discussed with less concern over moral issues and became more paternalistic; insane women were portrayed as

⁶⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 June 1838; *Leeds Mercury*, 11 April 1835.

⁶⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 June 1838.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 March 1837.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1837.

⁷⁰ Anthony Cooke, *A History of Drinking: The Scottish Pub since 1700*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 136; David Thornton, ‘Mr Mercury - a Biographical Study of Edward Baines with Special Reference to His Role as Editor, Author and Politician’ (Ph.D., University of Leeds (United Kingdom), 1999), 72.

having no power over their actions or their mental state. An unnamed woman from York was stated to have stolen expensive handkerchiefs, and, when an official examination found that she was insane, the prosecutor ‘refused to proceed further in the matter’ setting the woman free.⁷¹ In another instance, a female servant expressed similar protective behaviour towards her ‘insane’ mistress.⁷² When the servant discovered her mistress killed her child, she asked the perpetrator if she could get the doctor, to which the murderer replied that she should instead stay with her. The servant testified that the murderer was ‘in a very responding state for some time... frequently talked of destroying herself’.⁷³

While intemperance in criminal insanity reports was not confined to male cases, it was mainly men who were more likely to be accused of being ‘mad’ and labouring inter *delirium tremens* or drunkenness. Alcohol and violent behaviour were stated by the papers as the principle precursors of insanity in male criminal cases published after 1834, followed by eccentricity and religious fanaticism, discussed in the previous section. The crime headings, discussed below, often referred to male criminals as ‘lunatic’ or ‘dangerous lunatic’, giving them an identity of a violent lunatic, one of the categories of masculine madness discussed by Busfield.⁷⁴

Male lunatics were portrayed as ‘dangerous’. Articles published in the Leeds newspapers in the 1830s, suggest contemporary concern with the legal use of the diagnosis of insanity as well as concern about the threat posed by violent male lunatics. Headlines such as ‘Dangerous Lunatic’ and ‘Murder of...by a Lunatic’ were increasingly common, replacing standard crime headlines associated with criminal lunacy in the 1820s, such as ‘Murder’ or ‘Attempted Murder’.⁷⁵ The difference was the presence of ‘lunatic’ in the title as an identifying feature of the perpetrator, for example, ‘a blow from Henry Harrison, a lunatic’ or ‘Samuel Penny, a lunatic’.⁷⁶ The press now saw lunacy or insanity as the reason for the crime, but used less print space to suggest possible causes of insanity. Whereas previously articles interested in the causes of the disease appeared frequently, after the late 1820s they took insanity for granted. Most articles ended by stating that lunatics would be detained at an asylum, or, in the case of Samuel Penny, by saying that ‘there is little doubt he will be

⁷¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 19 October 1839.

⁷² *Leeds Mercury*, 11 April 1835.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Busfield, ‘The Female Malady?’, 269.

⁷⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 November 1832, 11 July 1835, 16 July 1836; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 March 1837, 9 June 1838.

⁷⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 3 November 1832, 16 July 1836.

removed to the lunatic asylum'.⁷⁷ These articles viewed those presumed insane as a special sort of criminal, rather than someone affected by insanity; the disease itself appears as an act of crime. An insanity defence was becoming more commonplace due to the increased presence of medical experts in court, yet the medicalisation of criminal insanity did not make it more socially acceptable. Owing to an increase in the popularity of the moral treatment of insanity, the public could have assumed that those who were acquitted on the basis of lunacy were effectively avoiding the penalty.

In approximately twenty percent of the reports the verdict was stated as *guilty*, despite the fact that defendants often displayed unstable behaviour, or were said to have inherited insanity. The justice system was as critical of an insanity defence as ever, and the likelihood of acquittal was the same in the 1830s as it was earlier.⁷⁸ However, both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* reported failed insanity defence cases more often from the early 1830s. Reports published in the late 1830s were especially critical of the defendants. In 1838, the *Intelligencer* reported a case entitled 'Shocking Matricide', detailing the perpetrator's 'erratic and unsound state of mind' prior to the brutal beatings he inflicted on his mother.⁷⁹ The jury returned the verdict of wilful murder in a closing statement to the article. Whether guilty or insane, the press, and the courts, preferred the insane criminals to be confined, seeing these offenders as especially 'dangerous' and unpredictable.

Conclusion

The main task of assize reports was to provide arresting material for the newspaper readers. In order to provide the most crowd-drawing material and to compete with the cheaper publications, as well as the London titles, the Leeds press chose to focus on publishing reports of the most violent crimes. As Chassaigne argues, crime connected people of the same social group; reports containing criminal insanity were provided specifically for the middle-class readership. While there is plenty of evidence to suggest that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, violent crime was favoured by the press over the publication of less affecting offences such as theft, most historians avoid using the term 'sensationalism' to describe violent crime reports. However, both Walsh and Curtis agree that the publication of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 16 July 1836.

⁷⁸ Nigel Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 68.

⁷⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 June 1838.

violent crime, and especially gory details, enabled the press to avoid accusations of deliberate sensationalism and still provide their readers with affecting material.

Moral criticism of the lower classes in the early nineteenth-century press has been largely overlooked by historians who have focused instead on the material published during the moral panic of the 1860s. Yet, between 1808 and 1840, the Leeds press represented mental illness in a similar moralistic and sensational way, especially during the Poor Law reform campaigns. Insanity was a gendered, mainly lower-class problem. Poor Law reform campaigns made cases of female child murder their focus, suggesting that female insanity transgressed traditional roles of women as wives and mothers. Reports on female insanity continued after 1834, displaying paternalistic views of insane women. However, insanity was also a male disease that showed male transgressions of gender norms, without necessarily implying that insanity was a malady that carried feminine connotations. Male criminal insanity focused on financial trouble and intemperance – traditionally masculine problems. Both female and male cases of criminal insanity were reported with the use of dramatic, theatrical detail, encouraging readers to sympathise with the victims of insanity while also feeling safely detached from them. Gradual increase in the use of lunacy as a legal defence led to an increase in the number of cases published and triggered concern about public safety as well as the viability of acquittal on the grounds of insanity.

Chapter Two: Suicide Reports

Suicide became illegal in England in the thirteenth century, its victims requiring night-time burial and, if given a verdict of *felo de se* (lat. felon of himself), it could result in a forfeiture of possessions. Although suicide continued to be illegal until 1961, in practice, the verdict of *felo de se* was seldom applied, and in the nineteenth century the majority of suicides received an automatic verdict of insanity.¹ Although early nineteenth-century suicides were regularly reported by the press and were also recorded in the local coroners' reports, there is no source that can give historians definite information. One historian refers to the historiography of suicide as a methodological minefield due to the lack of reliable data.² Yet factual analysis of contemporary documents, such as coroners' reports and asylum admission documents, remains central in the studies conducted by most leading historians of suicide.

Most historians of suicide focus on either the early modern or the Victorian period and later. A foundational text on the history of suicide, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (1987) by Olive Anderson, adopts a Durkheimian approach by analysing suicide statistics. One of the most recent successful histories of suicide, *This Rash Act: Suicide across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (1998) by Victor Bailey, claims to construct a more reliable study by looking at the inquest files from Hull.³ Both studies, however, fail to speculate on the portrayal of insanity and the role it played amongst the population. These studies also focus on a time vastly different to the period discussed in this thesis.

The first scholarly work to discuss media portrayal of insanity was MacDonald and Murphy's *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*. MacDonald and Murphy use newspaper reports as evidence of the existence of non-religious attitudes towards suicide in the early modern period and ascribe newspapers with an important role in facilitating a change in the hermeneutics of self-murder.⁴ In their view, suicide was portrayed as something that had social, financial and psychological causes rather than as a result of the 'supernatural'.⁵ MacDonald and Murphy argue that in the eighteenth century widely

¹ John C. Weaver and David Wright, *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 91.

² Victor Bailey, *This Rash Act: Suicide across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998), 3.

³ Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Bailey, *This Rash Act*.

⁴ MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 301.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

circulated weekly and daily papers were a new development that had a much larger audience than, for example, burial notices. Newspapers provided a more tolerant view of the act, by concluding suicide notices with an increasingly common medical verdict of *non-compos mentis* (lat. not of sound mind) later replaced by *insanity*. MacDonald and Murphy argue that blood and politics were the staples of the press in the eighteenth century, and suicide reports were amongst the articles selected for inclusion in newspapers because of their possibly effective value in preventing suicides. The inclusion of details of suicides could have been due also to competition between papers for empirical veracity.⁶ But why were some suicides reported in much greater detail or through a more elaborate narrative than others? Although it was beyond the means of this project to compare press coverage with another source that recorded local suicides (i.e. coroners' reports), it is possible to determine why certain reports were omitted from print by looking at the details favoured by newspapers and the amount of printing space allowed for the reports. These factors determined the sensational, moralistic, educational or, otherwise, socialising value of the reports.

Rab Houston expands on MacDonald and Murphy's argument by exploring the newspaper's role as the most popular source for information on suicide available for the public. As a part of his analysis of the Georgian northern British press, Houston explores the role played by suicide reports, which provided sensational, moral, sympathetic, and 'sensible' content. Houston argues that, while the cases were selected for inclusion based on their sensational value, the upper- and middle-class victims were reported with greater respect than the lower-class perpetrators, the tone of whose obituaries was very moralistic and revealed much about current social problems.⁷ According to Houston, the press gendered suicide reports, with females most commonly depicted as experiencing relationship/family problems, and males often associated with financial problems; the poor generally were most likely to commit suicide.⁸ Houston concludes that rather than normalising suicide, as argued by MacDonald and Murphy, press reports located it within a contemporary social and moral context.⁹

Between 1808 and 1840, the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* reported 108 female and 268 male suicides, numbers different to the national ratio, as cited by Houston: 250 female to

⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁷ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 334.

⁸ Ibid., 338–339.

⁹ Ibid., 341.

300 male.¹⁰ Although the number of male suicides superseded the female throughout the time scope of this research, the years between 1828 and 1840 show the biggest difference in ratio: 65 female to 189 male. The difference in ratio could be attributed to the geographical peculiarities of Yorkshire; as an industrial county with large male workforce, it suffered from overcrowding and poor living conditions, as well as poor working conditions, most notably at the coal mines. The lower-class movements (such as Luddite movement) and the emergence of Chartism in Yorkshire, suggests that a high percentage of the region's population remained discontented. However, the editors devoted more space to female suicides, which were often reported in greater detail than male deaths. These findings correspond to Houston's assertion that suicide coverage in the Northumberland press prioritised female suicides. The rest of the longer reports were also socially selective; most record suicides of politicians or other wealthy men, while shorter notices were mainly concerned with the lower labouring classes.

The detailed longer reports not only demonstrated that the paper was factually accurate, as argued by MacDonald and Murphy, but also to provided sensational content. The suicide of Samuel Romilly (d.1818) attracted great media attention, and prompted the papers to report on his personal life in great detail as both an explanation of his act and as a sensational romantic story of love and loss. Lord Castlereagh (d. 1822) was a much less popular politician than Romilly; the press, however, used the news of his suicide to publish lengthy sensational reports detailing his illness and desperate mental state. Castlereagh's mental torments, much like Romilly's grief, became a subject of national attention. Another popular type of sensational suicide report – double suicides – functioned in much the same way as political suicides, by providing sensational content without 'deliberate' sensationalising on the papers' part.

The geographical, as well as physical, location of self-murder often exposed the social class of the victim and determined the tone used by the press. While the press reported financial despondency as one of the main reasons for suicide throughout the period discussed in this thesis, bankruptcy of the middle classes was one of the most featured issues between 1808 and 1818. Before the relaxation of insolvency laws in the 1820s, fear of bankruptcy, regarded as a moral failing, was great. The period between 1818 and 1828 was characterised by press campaigns for Poor Law reform, which resulted in moralistic coverage, similar to the assize reports on child-murder and infanticide during the same period. Meanwhile,

¹⁰ Rab Houston, 'Fact, Truth, and the Limits of Sympathy: Newspaper Reporting of Suicide in the North of England, Circa 1750-1830', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 44, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 96.

discussion of intemperance was gaining momentum before dominating suicide coverage in the 1830s during the height of the temperance movement. Debates on female immorality and family dysfunction as reasons for suicide continued throughout the late Georgian era. However, after the establishment of the New Poor Law, the *Intelligencer* chose to focus on financial despondency of the lower-classes as a result of the insufficient poor relief, criticising the Malthusian ideas predominant in liberal print. The *Intelligencer's* stance resulted in increasingly sympathetic depictions of lower-class suicides.

Both papers portrayed subversion of the social class and gender norms through the publication of reports on suicidal insanity. The language associated with suicide victims became increasingly class-divided after the changes brought on by the Asylum Act of 1808. The examination of the Leeds press shows that the issues of class were central in suicide reporting and were not confined to cases featuring financial despondency, as considered by Houston. The reports published prior to the widespread discussions of insanity characteristic of the years following the establishment of the first Country Asylum in Yorkshire in 1818, focused on male cases of suicide triggered by financial disgrace. After 1818, suicide reports increasingly gendered suicidal insanity by discussing family values and appropriate female behaviour in the cases of female suicides. Male suicide reports focused on financial problems and, increasingly, intemperance, reiterating the concerns expressed in the assize reports.

1808 – 1818

Between 1808 and 1818, when interest in suicides increased along with interest in mental illness, suicides of politicians and nobles received the most attention in the press, and double suicides became increasingly popular due to their romantic appeal. The majority of suicide reports concerned the lower classes and adopted a moralistic tone rather than a sensational one. However, all reports exhibited a degree of sympathy and detachment.

Houston's assertion that the suicide reporting in the early nineteenth century was subtly selective and didactic resonates especially well with the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* reports published after 1818. Suicide reports published prior to 1818 provided readers with sensational and affecting content, but did not show the same level of deliberate sensationalising as the reports published after 1818. Approximately a third of the reports published between 1808 and 1818 were too short to include a large amount of sensational

detail, and newspapers simply stated the way in which suicide was committed, for example: ‘shot himself through the body’, ‘threw himself in the river and was drowned’ or ‘was found hanging from a tree’.¹¹ In the shorter cases, as in longer, newspapers always reported the exact method of suicide. The publication of the name, location and occupation of victims was probably done for empirical veracity, as argued by MacDonald and Murphy.

The majority of the reports, however, provided information on the circumstances preceding the act, the exact way the suicide was thought to have been committed and possible repercussions and or reasons for the act. Such in-depth reporting suggests that the public was fascinated with the shocking subject of suicide and the way it was committed, regardless of the victim’s social class. In 1813, the *Mercury* stated that a well off gentleman, Mr. S. Smith, was reported to have ‘hanged himself with remarkable deliberation and method’.¹² The paper then described Smith’s preparation for his suicide that included writing and attesting a will moments before he killed himself. In another instance, the *Intelligencer* reported the suicide of a prisoner in the Castle of York who destroyed himself ‘(when in bed, along with another prisoner, and in company with three persons) by cutting his throat with an old razor, which he unfortunately purloined from a fellow-prisoner’.¹³ The details included in suicide reports were beyond basic, and appear just as affecting as the details found in criminal insanity cases.

Suicides of politicians and noblemen, much like the crimes committed against them, were popular with the reading public. The suicide of a Whig politician, Sir Samuel Romilly, on 2 November 1818 caused an explosion of newspapers articles that gave a rundown of both his career and the circumstances surrounding his death. The papers perceived the recent death of his wife to have caused his temporary insanity. Possibly, due to Romilly’s fame as a reformer, the *Mercury*’s account of his death was more in depth than the one in the *Intelligencer*, amounting to two full sized columns.¹⁴ Although political differences between the two Leeds papers were not as pronounced as they became in the 1830s when the Whig and the Conservative parties properly evolved, the *Mercury* was evidently favourable towards Romilly’s career. Prior to Romilly’s suicide, Baines expressed his appreciation for Romilly’s role in modernising criminal law.¹⁵ The account given by the *Mercury*, borrowed from the ‘*Morning Paper*’, was a detailed witness testimony concluded by the jury’s verdict of

¹¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April, 19 September 1812; 3 September 1814.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6 November 1817.

¹³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 October 1817.

¹⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 November 1818.

¹⁵ Thornton, ‘Mr Mercury - a Biographical Study of Edward Baines with Special Reference to His Role as Editor, Author and Politician’, 139.

‘temporary mental derangement’ given ‘without hesitation’, signifying a great deal of respect towards Romilly who, it was believed, would never have committed such an unthinkable act unless he was insane.¹⁶ After the witness testimony, the paper declared:

The following anecdote of Sire[sic] Samuel Romilly has come to us from a very respectable quarter. We give it publicity with the more pleasure, that it not only tends to illustrate the moour[sic] ful[sic] circumstances of his death, but casts an affecting and ennobling light on the moral excellencies[sic] of his character.¹⁷

Subsequent discussion focused on the circumstances of Romilly’s marriage that, according to the paper, produced the ‘tranquillity of domestic joy’.¹⁸ The story highlighted the loss of his wife as Romilly’s one and only reason for committing suicide, but it also provided readers with a romantic tale of love, dedication, loss and death.

Suicides of public figures, such as Romilly who was much loved by the public, were exaggerated forms of typical suicide reports, displaying more elaborate descriptions of grief and more elaborate attempts at justifying the suicide. The press was not always kind towards public figures – Romilly’s death received a fair share of articles criticising his political choices – but none were as critical as the reports on the suicide of Lord Castlereagh in 1822.¹⁹ Romilly’s suicide did not present the middle-class press with the commonly criticised, indulgent noble or politician whose death or mental illness was a result of his own vices, as Romilly was known as a self-made man who displayed hard work and love for his family, an ‘ideal man of the middle class’.²⁰

Double suicides and suicides that included a murder caused special interest. Before 1818 they focused on gory details and predated the theatrical detail of the criminal insanity reports published after 1818. In describing Lieutenant Sharp’s murder of his suitor Miss Shuckburgh and his subsequent suicide, the *Intelligencer* reported:

...as Miss Shuckburgh uttered the words, *No, no!* he (the witness) immediately heard the report of a pistol, which, in a few seconds, was succeeded by another, and they were instantly lifeless corpses!! – After a most

¹⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 November 1818.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Castlereagh’s case will be discussed in greater depth in the next section. Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

deliberate investigation of all the circumstances of this most affecting and awful event, a verdict of *Lunacy* was given.²¹

The *Mercury* used a similar technique in the report on suicide and murder committed by William Waghorn, producing an eight-year-old Edward Waghorn's testimony describing the events in meticulous detail, including quotes and emotive language.²² Whether a child of eight could have realistically given such a detailed testimony is debatable, but the paper chose to publish it, including theatrical dialogue quotes and exclamation marks.

Newspapers portrayed all suicides, regardless of the social class of the victim, as sensational, though the language and occasionally geographical details in the reports indicated the victim's social standing. For example, a report published in the *Mercury* in May 1814 stated that a man named Thwaite 'hung himself in his employer's barn... and remained undiscovered for several hours'.²³ The paper did not provide the man's full name or his profession. Apart from the blatant way the *Mercury* addressed the victim, the location of the act – 'Sheepbridge, near Huddersfield' – was a highly industrial area and a centre of lower-class uprisings.²⁴ In contrast, a report on a well-off gentleman named Henry Peach, Esq. stated that Peach, 'having purloined a razor from his hair-dresser, cut his throat in so shocking a manner, that he expired in about ten minutes'.²⁵ A name of a wealthy man was given in full, while the title of Esquire and the word 'gentleman' reaffirmed Peach's status and set him apart from both the labouring and the lower-middling classes. Moreover, the language used to report the suicide of a wealthy Peach was more respectable and dramatic, stating that he died promptly in the comfort of his home, in contrast to Thwaite, whose body was found 'in his employer's barn' after an unknown amount of time.²⁶ The geographical location within the county and physical location of the crime in the above cases reflected the victims' social class and determined the tone used by the press.

Prior to 1818, Leeds newspapers portrayed suicidal insanity as a male illness. Financial despondency was among the most common reasons for self-murder, and between 1808 and 1818 it was mainly related to bankruptcy experienced by the male individuals of the

²¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 April 1809.

²² *Leeds Mercury*, 22 April 1815.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1814.

²⁴ Huddersfield was the hub of the Luddite uprising of 1812 and a centre of Anti-Poor Law movement of 1834, as well as other instances of civil agitation. See David Griffiths, 'Huddersfield in Turbulent Times, 1815–1850: Who Ruled and How?', *Northern History* 52, no. 1 (1 March 2015): 102.

²⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 21 June 1817.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1814, 21 June 1817.

middling ranks.²⁷ Bankruptcy to the middle-class male population was not unlike the Malthusian idea of poverty applied to the lower classes – society saw those who became bankrupt as failing to work hard and lacking virtue. For example, Mr. L., a stockbroker, who shot himself after receiving information on his debts, was in a situation far from poverty.²⁸ Cotton manufacturer Emanuel Lee drowned after a commission of bankruptcy was launched against him, well before his estate would have been reduced.²⁹ The problem of bankruptcy was not a matter of financial hardship, but rather a moral issue. In the eighteenth century, English law considered bankruptcy as fraud and saw debt as a sign of bad character.³⁰ In the nineteenth century, the extended Bankruptcy Lists published in newspapers caused a similar moral and social panic as the newspaper suicide reports of the 1820s. In her work on the depiction of bankruptcy in the Victorian novel, Barbara Weiss shows that insolvency was the most catastrophic and the most feared of the economic failures.³¹ Weiss argues that a peculiarly middle-class fear of bankruptcy grew throughout the nineteenth century as the speed of economic transactions increased with industrialisation.³² Bankruptcy also carried moral stigma, as the market economy in the nineteenth century was developing alongside increasingly important moral and religious virtues.³³

The papers did not publish all suicides. According to Houston, the omissions in suicide reporting in the North of England were mainly the middle-aged middle-class people whose families managed to avoid the unfavourable publicity.³⁴ The data for Northern England provided by Houston is likely similar to Yorkshire, with the exception of suicides of people whose professions were specific to Yorkshire, such as coal miners. Yet the Leeds papers published a number of middle-aged middle-class suicides, such as the case of Peach from the town of Acomb or victims who experienced bankruptcy. Perhaps the reason for the omission of these suicide reports, at least in the case of the Leeds press, was the lack of sensation or moralism of certain cases, and the middle-aged, middle-class cases were most likely to be of little interest. Barrie's argument that the press selected trials for publication based on their amusement and moralistic value appears more plausible.³⁵ Before 1818 the

²⁷ There is no sufficient data to determine to what extent female suicides were gendered between 1808 and 1818.

²⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 16 April 1808.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 March 1816.

³⁰ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 99.

³¹ Barbara Weiss, *The Hell of the English: Bankruptcy and the Victorian Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986), 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁴ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 334.

³⁵ Barrie, 'Naming and Shaming', 353.

Leeds press still published middle-class suicides if they contained sensational value. The report on the suicide of Lieutenant Sharp, for example, contained details of a romantic feud that ended in murder and self-distracted, while the suicide of a well-off man named S. Smith was reported because of the elaborate way he committed suicide.³⁶

Throughout the time period of this project, the papers provided either the victims' age or an indication of their age whenever it specified someone especially young or old, rendering the published reports more affecting. It was popular with the Leeds press to state if the individual was old or young, as these descriptions pointed out someone who should have waited to either die by the natural causes or was too young to die. The *Mercury* referred to the death of a 'young man' named Tranter as one of the 'most deliberate and horrid suicides'.³⁷ Papers emphasised the extremity of the two most striking suicides by Sarah Etherington, aged sixty-seven, and William Ward, aged fifteen, by providing singular post-death details. Etherington's body was found floating on the water, rather than sunken; Ward committed suicide because of his sister's execution scheduled on the same day, ignorant, the paper stated, that his sister was pardoned.³⁸ The sympathy was, in Houston's terms, 'limited' and aimed at selected suicides only, mainly towards those especially young or old, or those individuals, who were prolific in one way or another, as in the case of well-respected politician Romilly.

Along with affecting sympathetic details, the Leeds press included sensible explanations that justified suicide whenever possible. The search for an explanation in most suicide reports verifies MacDonald and Murphy's argument that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, suicide explanations were secularised and allowed no room for the 'supernatural'.³⁹ In opposition to MacDonald and Murphy, Houston suggests that in regional Britain, rather than providing secular explanations for suicide, newspapers championed Christian morality, which excluded from the community those who committed suicide. In Houston's view, moralism limited sympathy and sensibility implied exclusion of individuals, as these approaches distanced the victims from the readers. The sensible, sympathetic suicide reports provided newspaper readers with morally safe material, the subject of which – suicide – was dignified by a dose of mourning in the beginning of each report and an explanation for the deed towards the end. The reports were not simple non-religious remarks on suicide that

³⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 April 1809; *Leeds Mercury*, 6 November 1813.

³⁷ *Leeds Mercury* 28 July 1810.

³⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 2 September 1816, 9 August 1819.

³⁹ MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 336.

commented on individual cases, as MacDonald and Murphy argue, but in the case of middle-class press, segregative analyses that tried to make sense of such an unthinkable act as suicide, and were limited in their sympathy.

1818 – 1828

The 1823 Burial of Suicide Act relaxed laws around suicide burials, and the forfeiture of *felo de se* goods stopped in 1870. The first half of the nineteenth century was, therefore, an important time of change in the way in which suicide was viewed. From 1818, the number of suicides reported by the English press increased by approximately three times, which reflected public concern over what was considered a rapid increase in suicide rates.⁴⁰ Not all suicides were reported by the press and, according to MacDonald and Murphy, by publishing suicide reports ‘casually’ and often, the press discouraged supernaturalistic explanations of these deeds.⁴¹ However, as the previous section argues, the selective publication of suicide reports could have been based on the socialising value of particular suicides. The repeated publication of suicide reports in newspapers also helped to create a myth that suicide was commonplace in England, if not an epidemic.⁴² It is clear that between 1818 and 1840, the Leeds papers fostered concern about the increase in suicide. Among the most reported cases were moralistic accounts of suicides committed out of financial despondency, family dysfunction (mainly in female cases) and, increasingly, intemperance, which was mainly attributed to men.

The suicide that generated the most attention between 1818 and 1830 was that of Viscount Castlereagh in 1822. Both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* stated Castlereagh’s suicide to have been the result of the intensity of his political work, quoting the Viscount’s words said to have been uttered two days before his death: “‘Business and I must part – the perplexities of the office are too much for me – I cannot endure them much longer.’”⁴³ The *Intelligencer* asserted that ‘amongst his domestics his lordship was idolised’ and that before

⁴⁰ Although there was a big increase in the instances of suicide in France, Belgium and Prussia, there appears no evidence to suggest that there was a significant increase in suicide instances in England. Contemporary statistical data suggests that there was a small eight percent variation of English suicide rates throughout the nineteenth century. See Daryl Lee, ‘Accounting for Self-Destruction: Morselli, Moral Statistics and the Modernity of Suicide’, *Intellectual History Review* 19, no. 3 (1 January 2009): 339.

⁴¹ MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 306.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 August 1822; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 August 1822.

he committed suicide, in his will, Castlereagh ‘made provision for every person on his establishment; even to the lowest helper in his stables; a circumstance perfectly in unison with the whole tenour[sic] of his private life’.⁴⁴ Andrew suggests that the uneasy public feelings over Castlereagh’s career were a reason his domesticity received praise. Castlereagh’s conservative and somewhat repressive political views made him both loved and hated, and the newspaper reports mirrored the divide in public opinion.⁴⁵ As a conservative newspaper, the *Intelligencer* made an effort to praise Castlereagh’s domestic virtues; in contrast, the *Mercury* focused solely on the description of the politician’s mental illness. As in Romilly’s case, the suicide of a politician provided sensational, emotional content; the *Mercury*, in particular, took pleasure in the Tory politician’s suicide.

Double suicides were another category that increased in popularity after 1818, receiving the same amount of coverage as political suicides. The Leeds press published double suicides as dramatic, romantic accounts, typically occupying the space of half a column, as opposed to a two-sentence paragraph enjoyed by most suicide reports. The paper embellished the story of elderly John Tyres and his sister, who were robbed of ‘all they possessed’, stating that the robbers ‘stole the sheets upon which she (the victim) was lying, also some bacon’.⁴⁶ The paper also described the frailty of the elderly victims: ‘the old man defended himself with a fork as long as he was able’.⁴⁷ After the incident, the siblings vowed to commit suicide, an intent accomplished successfully by the elderly female. In a different report, the double suicide of sisters Agnes and Sophia Anderson also demonstrated a familial bond and dedication. The Anderson sisters, described to be ‘in the highest degree respectable’, were afraid of the consequences of failed money affairs, vowing to commit suicide.⁴⁸ As in Tyres’ case, the paper re-enacted the scene of death, describing ‘a most extraordinary circumstance’, the body of the youngest sister found dressed by her older sister for an honourable funeral, before she also passed.⁴⁹

The press gave particular attention to double suicides with romantic context. The *Intelligencer* dedicated a lengthy article to an attempted double suicide of a failed romantic couple Rev. Towne and Miss Ann Wright. The paper presented Towne’s and Wright’s story in a theatrical manner, quoting Towne’s cries for help and his mother’s response: “‘mother!

⁴⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 August 1822.

⁴⁵ Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice*, 117.

⁴⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 June 1822

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 December 1827.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

mother!’ and the listening anxious parent soon recognised her son’s voice’.⁵⁰ When Miss Wright was found dead, the *Intelligencer* described her body as ‘not quite cold, appeared asleep and as blooming as when alive, but in a short time her colour fled, and she assumed the livery of death’.⁵¹ Sensational suicides, for instance, the ones that included a love story, dramatised insanity and made it a part of a romantic narrative. Such depiction of insanity and suicide was both entertaining and detached.

The Leeds press often reinforced family values, as one of the most popular moralistic concerns, through the publication of female suicide reports. A report published by the *Intelligencer* suggested that an unnamed young servant woman, who was found drowned, was suspected by her employers to have been in the state of illegitimate pregnancy.⁵² Shame was suspected to have caused young unmarried pregnant women to commit suicide. For example, when Nancy Goodaire drowned in 1827, the newspaper report stated that ‘there is every reason to believe that the unfortunate young woman was pregnant... with her character injured...she was driven to commit the rush[sic] act’.⁵³ The public was concerned with young single pregnant women, which was reflected in suicide reports, as well as in those on assizes, due to their reliance on poor relief. Clark argues that the fear of sexual scandal as a fear of the sexuality of collective groups, such as the working class, homosexuals or street workers was commonplace among the middle classes.⁵⁴ The New Poor Law of 1834 was one of the first legal attempts to regulate these ‘dangerous’ groups, followed by the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1860. Thus, the newspaper reports of suicides by pregnant women indicate that most of them were of a lower social class, with the exception of one report referring to a widow of an unknown status.⁵⁵

The physical description of the victim, and especially their dress, were often associated with their social classification and the newspaper’s moral message, what Houston calls the ‘micro-political arena of the coroner’s inquest’.⁵⁶ The body of Harriet Singleton, whose pregnancy the *Mercury* denied, was ‘found neatly laid out and covered with white linen’ and upon uncovering her face ‘the chill hand of death seemed to have fixed rather than faded the roses upon her cheeks’.⁵⁷ The paper was using an image of innocence to amplify

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29 October 1821.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 22 November 1819.

⁵³ Ibid., 21 June 1827.

⁵⁴ Clark, *Scandal*, 220.

⁵⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 22 April 1822.

⁵⁶ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 333.

⁵⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 February 1820.

the tragedy in the death of such a young person. In contrast, the above-mentioned Nancy Goodaire, who was pregnant when she committed suicide, was described as having been in ‘great distraction, when she divested herself of her shawl and bonnet, and rushed into the water’; the description of the victim undressing possibly signified the fall of her morals.⁵⁸ Men seldom featured in moralising accounts except in two cases: one attributing a man’s suicide to his extra-marital affair, the other accusing a woman of committing suicide ‘in the absence of her husband’.⁵⁹

Throughout the 1820s the Leeds press increasingly projected intemperance as one of the core reasons for male insanity. The victims whose insanity was occasioned by excessive drinking were exclusively of the lower and lower-middling ranks. The idea of temperance had been popular among the middle classes since the eighteenth century, and gained momentum during the 1820s. Edward Baines, the editor of the *Mercury*, chaired an inaugural meeting of the Leeds Temperance Society in 1830, and the public considered him a teetotaller; the presence of alcohol-condemning articles in his paper is therefore unsurprising.⁶⁰ Drinking was widespread in the 1820s, not least because of the lack of safe, clean water. Drinking places provided the poor with comforts their homes lacked, such as heating, literature and light; it was also a meeting place of the newly emerging trade unions.⁶¹ The middle classes saw intemperance as a problem of the poor in these early stages of the temperance movement. Papers saw drinking as mainly a lower-class male problem, although in 1825 the increase in consumption was mainly among the middle classes.⁶²

Suicide continued to be attributed to financial despondency in this period, but between 1819 and the 1830s, the middle-class fear of bankruptcy was replaced by lower-class poverty as a factor in suicides. One of the reasons bankruptcy did not feature could have been The Bankrupts Act of 1825. A contemporary politician and businessman, George Moffatt, referred to the new Act as a ‘foundation’ in the system of bankruptcy that repealed all previous acts and prohibited capital punishment, allowing individuals to start their own bankruptcy proceedings.⁶³ Instead of financial despondency based on bankruptcy, both the

⁵⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 21 June 1827.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 March 1826, 14 October 1824.

⁶⁰ Thornton, ‘Mr Mercury - a Biographical Study of Edward Baines with Special Reference to His Role as Editor, Author and Politician’, 17.

⁶¹ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1971), 53.

⁶² James Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 98.

⁶³ George Moffatt, *On the Bankruptcy Law of England* (London: William Ridgway, 1865), 9.

Intelligencer and the *Mercury* mentioned fear of poverty as a contributing factor in suicidal behaviour. For example, William Grant, the *Mercury* stated, was afraid of ‘poverty and the workhouse’.⁶⁴ According to Houston, when papers referred to the victims as ‘poor man’ or ‘poor woman’ it could have meant pity, but more likely referred to their the financial state.⁶⁵ The poverty-stricken morally-weak lower-class suicides were reported en mass and created an impression of a lower-class suicide pandemic, unlike singular reports of middle-class suicides attributed to bankruptcy.

Newspapers used more lenient, tolerant language in the suicide reports of middle- and upper-class victims. The *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* described conditions suffered by the ‘respectable’ victims, such as Lord Castlereagh and Samuel Romilly, using contemporary medical language: ‘depression of spirits’, ‘mental tension’, ‘nervous state’, ‘mental delusion’, ‘grievous disease/disorder’ ‘unnatural excitement’ and ‘anxiety’.⁶⁶ The reason behind such elaborate terminology was the presence of professional medical experts as defence witnesses in cases involving the middle- and upper-classes. In contrast, the ‘non-respectable’ victims had no one but their neighbours and family to defend their case.⁶⁷

The press attributed most lower-class suicides to ‘despondency’. The term must have had a clear moral connotation, as the reports rarely used it in the suicide reports of anybody higher than middling-lower class. Medical literature, such as *A New Medical Dictionary*, published in 1817 by Robert Hooper, a well-regarded medical writer and physician, makes no mention of ‘despondency’. However, ‘nervous diseases’ or ‘neuroses’, very middle-class terms, were stated by Hooper to be ‘affections of sense and motion, disturbed; without either idiopathic pyrexia [fever of unknown origin], or topical diseases’.⁶⁸ Hooper’s definition might appear vague now, but ‘nervous disease’ was a contemporary medical term, used selectively in middle- and upper-class cases by medical experts. The term ‘despondency’ was more stigmatising, and could have implied a lack of self-control or a lack of finances, an inappropriate description for a victim of a similar social rank as the average newspaper reader. The difference in terminology also helped to separate the respectable victims from the ‘poor’ and the ‘unfortunate’ so that the middle-class reader could sympathise with them

⁶⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 25 October 1828.

⁶⁵ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 335.

⁶⁶ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 August 1822; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 August 1822.

⁶⁷ MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, 134.

⁶⁸ Robert Hooper, *A New Medical Dictionary: Containing an Explanation of the Terms in Anatomy, Physiology ... and the Various Branches of Natural Philosophy Connected with Medicine* (London: E. & R. Parker, M. Carey, and B. Warner, 1817), 532.

without making a personal connection, thus remaining detached. The lack of precise medical explanation in the cases of lower-class suicides highlighted the ‘medical otherness’ of the middle- and upper-class cases.

1828 – c.1840

During the 1830s there were notable differences between the reports in the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury*. The sudden emergence of Temperance Societies in most major British towns in 1829 and 1830, due to a fear surrounding an 1825 rise in spirit consumption, resulted in the *Mercury*’s focus on intemperance as one of the main cases of suicidal behaviour, as the paper’s proprietor was an evangelical supporter of the Leeds Temperance Society.⁶⁹ There were also significant differences between the Tory and Whig newspapers’ portrayal of financial despondency owing to the *Mercury*’s support for the New Poor Law, which the *Intelligencer*, in an attempt to unite the aristocracy and the lower classes against the middle-class Leeds manufacturers, criticised for its overly Malthusian policies.

Suicides of the nobleman Lord Thomas Graves and politician John Calcraft, rich in medical terminology, headlined the Leeds press in the early 1830s. Medical testimony, now a routine part of inquests on the suicides of individuals from respectable classes, provided an abundance of terms, surpassing the descriptions found in Romilly’s and Castlereagh’s suicide reports.⁷⁰ Some of the descriptions published were: ‘paroxysm of mental excitement’, ‘nervous fever’, ‘aberration of mind’, and, increasingly, ‘depression’ – a term that was subsequently popularised among medical practitioners in the 1860s.⁷¹ The use of such terms indicated both the increased sophistication of the reading public as well as the development of medical expertise on the subject. The rich medical terminology was accompanied by discussion of personal and professional virtue. Nationally circulated reports of Lady Graves’ affair, seen as the trigger of Lord Graves’ death, were widely discussed in the press.⁷² A week after reporting Lord Graves’ death, the *Intelligencer* produced a sizable article refuting the argument that any unresolved ‘misunderstanding in his lordship’s family’ was the trigger, stating that ‘Lord Graves had also many sources of personal vexation, wholly independent of

⁶⁹ Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, 98.

⁷⁰ Reports on Romilly and Castlereagh used such terms as: ‘agony of mind’, ‘anxiety’, ‘unnatural excitement’, and ‘mental tension’. ‘*Leeds Mercury*, 7 November 1818; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 August 1822.

⁷¹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 February 1830; *Leeds Mercury*, 17 September 1831.

⁷² *The Gentleman’s Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, March 1830, 267-268

that which has been recently the subject of public discussion' among them health and financial problems.⁷³ The paper printed an extensive discussion of the affair thought to have caused Lord Graves' death, and despite censoring any explicit information, provided the reading public with speculative analysis of a famous scandal.

Romanticised, scandalous double suicides, as well as murder/suicides, continued to increase in popularity throughout the 1830s, along with suicides thought to be committed on the grounds of romantic rejection. The stories were told in visual, theatrical detail; papers focused on the circumstances of love affairs prior to fatal acts being committed. In 1831, the *Intelligencer* published a story of a young, recently married local organist John Hughes and widowed housekeeper Mrs Westley whose association had resulted in 'an illicit intercourse'.⁷⁴ The report presented a romantic story of two people, a middle-aged widow and a young man stated to be blind, who bonded during their music lessons. The story was scandalised with the detail of adultery, perversion of family values and betrayal, as the said acts all took place at their master's/friend's house respectively. The story ended with Hughes and Westley found 'closely embraced in each other's arms, both weltering in their blood'.⁷⁵

The majority of double suicide reports portrayed women as harmless victims. According to Houston, such stories derived their theatrical appeal from Aristotelian rhetoric, in the form of humanist sermons, as well as Jacobean drama, both praising virtuous female suicide.⁷⁶ The presence of a male seducer as a reason for female suicide reinforced the idea that vulnerability was a female virtue.⁷⁷ 'Unfortunate' Mrs Westley was induced 'to enter into the horrible compact suggested by Hughes' and, having lacked the courage to commit the deed herself, Mrs Westley had to submit to Hughes' suggestion that he would kill them both.⁷⁸ The appeal, as well as rarity, of these stories caused them to often be published by both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury*, as in the case of the suicide of Andrew Roy and Elizabeth Meadley, who were found drowned near the town of Ripon. The suicide caused both papers to produce more than one article detailing the circumstances of the young lovers' death as well as their relationship.⁷⁹ Roy and Meadley's case, said the *Mercury*, 'excited the

⁷³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 February 1830 following the original report on 11 February 1830.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1831.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 342.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 August, 1 September 1831; *Leeds Mercury*, 27 August 1831.

deepest sympathy among all classes', which suggests that the victims were respected though of a humble social class.⁸⁰

Female suicides, like criminal reports on insane women, constituted a distinct phenomenon during the 1830s, and appeared to have been committed for more personal reasons than those by men. Most female suicides reported in the Leeds press were of female criminals – either child murderers, prostitutes, prisoners – or pregnant and abandoned young women. Most commonly, the papers mentioned child murderers and pregnant single women, mirroring the portrayal of female criminality in assize reports popular before the establishment of the New Poor Law. Female murder and suicide reports displayed contemporary moral concerns present before the introduction of the New Poor Law that limited the rights of women with bastard children. It was reported that Sarah Tate, a young woman residing in Leeds, was induced to commit the 'rash act' when she found out she was pregnant.⁸¹ Another young lady of unknown status or occupation committed suicide out of distress experienced when her husband of eighteen months deserted her.⁸² Houston argues that the reports of female suicide focused on problems of personal relations; female suicide was often seen as a result of family dysfunction.⁸³ Unwanted pregnancies assaulted traditional middle-class family values.

Apart from the fear of family dysfunction, the portrayal of female suicides between 1830 and 1840 displayed contemporary moral concerns about prostitution, religion and female criminality. Female victims often transgressed their gender norms through their abnormal circumstances; some were inmates of lunatic asylums, the York Castle or, as in the case of prostitute Jane Whiteley, recently released from prison.⁸⁴ Other women were subverting the gender norms by being financially independent like the single schoolmistress Eliza Whitbourne.⁸⁵ Lisa Lieberman, in her article on the portrayal of suicide and adulterous women in nineteenth-century French literature, traces society's obsession with female behaviour; increasing sexual and personal independence was regarded as threatening.⁸⁶ It is plausible to say that in Britain female behaviour was monitored in literature and the press

⁸⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 1 September 1831.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 26 October 1833.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30 June 1838.

⁸³ Houston, *Punishing the Dead?*, 338.

⁸⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 September 1836.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1834; 27 May 1830.

⁸⁶ Lisa Lieberman, 'Crimes of Reason, Crimes of Passion: Suicide and the Adulterous Woman in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Family History* 24, no. 2 (1 April 1999): 133.

throughout the nineteenth century, much like in France. Women of the lower class were especially vulnerable to newspapers' judgement.

The reasons listed for lower-class female suicides included: financial problems, family dysfunction (e.g. desertion by a husband), moral digression (e.g. prostitution, pregnancy out of wedlock) and anti-social habits. Occasionally, though much less common than for male suicides, women were accused of eccentricity, religious fanaticism and intemperance. The reasons for female lower-class suicides were more varied than those of lower-class males, which were mostly attributed to financial despondency, intemperance and eccentricity. The greater variety of reasons for suicides within a smaller proportion of suicide reports (between 1828 and 1840 the ratio of Leeds suicide reports was sixty-five female to 189 male) suggests that the press stereotyped lower-class women as exhibiting a wider range of inappropriate behaviour. Such depiction of suicides of lower-class women is similar to that found in assize reports. As Goc argues, press portrayal of infanticide suggests that at least from the early 1820s, newspaper reports reinforced the idea that women were mentally and physically inferior.⁸⁷ Female suicidal insanity, much like criminal insanity, was therefore threatening to the social norms eagerly displayed by the middle-class press.

Both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* attributed around twenty percent of male suicides to alcoholic intemperance. While alcoholism was mentioned sporadically throughout the 1820s, in the 1830s there was regular discussion of alcohol as a contributing factor in insanity. 'Aggravated by habits of intemperance' and 'whose intemperance leads to further crime' were common explanations in press reports.⁸⁸ Common titles given to these reports included 'Suicide from Drinking' and 'Effects of Intemperance'.⁸⁹ The stories papers told were about both short and long-term effects of liquor. The *Intelligencer* reported that Richard Moor, a private soldier who shot himself, had 'taken liquor to excess, that about four or five days previously he had been confined for one night on that account'. His master told him to abstain from liquor the night Moor committed suicide, but the private was seen drunk.⁹⁰ Joseph Mawsen killed himself in a state of 'total derangement of mind... entirely caused by previous habits of intemperance'.⁹¹ In many cases, the papers described the drinking preceding the suicide in detail, taking up a fair amount of print space, up to half a column. About George Whip, the *Intelligencer* said 'He got tipsy, and was very merry. He called for

⁸⁷ Goc, *Women, Infanticide, and the Press, 1822-1922*, 23.

⁸⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 30 January 1830, 12 July 1834, 25 July and 22 August 1835, 27 January and 3 February 1838.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1830, 25 July, 22 August 1835, 3 February 1838.

⁹⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 May 1831.

⁹¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 27 January 1838.

brown jug and afterwards for some wine'.⁹² The paper also juxtaposed Whip's sober behaviour with his drunken antics: 'When sober, he has of late been sullen and thoughtful, and complained of his head, and when in liquor he has been much more excited and mischievous than formerly'.⁹³

Alcohol caused a similar moral panic in the 1830s to infanticide in the 1820s. The bad reputation of alcohol consumption, 'the cause of by far the greatest number of suicides', was amplified by the campaigns of the Temperance Societies present in all major British towns.⁹⁴ Leading historians of British suicide have neglected to address this shift. Victor Bailey mentions the common association between drinking and suicidal behaviour during early- and mid-Victorian years, but fails to discuss the influence of the temperance movement, simply stating that the evidence of intemperance was featured in a third of all male and half of all female cases, according to coroners' reports.⁹⁵ Yet, the temperance movement must have had considerable influence on the press. The proportion of the suicides attributed to alcohol intolerance in the *Mercury*, whose editor chaired the first meeting of the Leeds Temperance Society, was twice that of suicides in the *Intelligencer*, whose current editor, Robert Perring, was not involved in the temperance movement. Although the number of suicides reported by the *Mercury* was lower, the paper placed greater emphasis on the dangers of drinking. The rarity of the *delirium tremens* diagnosis in coroners' reports signals the lack of support from medical professionals towards alcohol prohibition, as only serious cases of *delirium tremens* were linked to spirits, and medical personnel relied heavily on the medicinal use of alcohol.⁹⁶ Temperance was a predominantly middle-class, partly evangelical and partly political movement, and alcohol consumption was regarded as a social rather than a health concern. Although the press did not connect intemperance and financial despondency, people of a low or an unidentifiable rank committed the majority of alcohol related suicides.⁹⁷

The *Intelligencer's* focus on lower-class financial despondency was sympathetic, inspired by Michael Sadler's population theories, that presented a more lenient theory of population growth as a response to Malthus' late-eighteenth-century works. In the 1830s the *Intelligencer* regarded lack of employment, lack of food, and poor living conditions as the

⁹² *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 December 1830.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 25 July 1835.

⁹⁵ Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 74.

⁹⁶ Brian Harrison, 'Drink and Sobriety in England 1815–1872', *International Review of Social History* 12, no. 02 (August 1967): 211.

⁹⁷ Unidentifiable meaning lacking Mr. or Esq. in male cases and information on 'respectability' in both male and female cases of suicide.

result of poor government provision. A change in the portrayal of lower-class suicides coincided with the 1832 Royal Commission into the operation of the Poor Laws, which addressed the high cost of poor relief and resulted in the 1834 New Poor Law that limited the support available for the lower classes, restricting workhouse access, as well as funds for women with illegitimate children. In one of the reports, the *Intelligencer* quoted a victim's suicide note: 'I cannot support my family'.⁹⁸ In another the paper stated that the victim was an 'unfortunate woman...reduced in circumstances, and was in the most miserable condition'.⁹⁹ The *Intelligencer*'s sympathetic portrayal of suicides committed out of financial despondency was due to the Tory newspaper's support for the Anti-Poor Law Movement that started in 1832 in reply to the Royal Commission supported by the Whig-Liberals, hence the absence of the Liberal *Mercury* in the Anti-Poor Law dialogue. In 1837, during the peak of the Anti-Poor Law Movement, the *Intelligencer* added an editorial comment following the report on a man who committed suicide after murdering his children: 'The horror that these poor people feel at the new workhouse system drives them mad'.¹⁰⁰ The portrayal of these suicides, therefore, remained removed and sympathetic, but differed entirely from the *Mercury*'s portrayal of the lower-class drinking despondency.

By the late 1830s reports of suicide were more common and more varied than in 1808. The topic provided the press with an opportunity to amuse their readers with sensational accounts of famous political suicides and romanticised detailed accounts of love affairs, which ended in despair and death. While the language in suicide reports of noblemen and politicians was increasingly medical in nature, as were the explanations for their deaths, the accounts of lower-class suicides were increasingly moralistic, providing messages about society's problems. Poor relief and bastardy laws as well as other social problems regarded as specifically lower-class, such as alcoholism, were widely discussed by the late 1830s after the New Poor Laws were passed, triggering a division in Yorkshire between Whig and Tory newspapers.

⁹⁸ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 April 1832.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 September 1837.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 June 1837.

Conclusion

Leeds newspapers created sensational content by publishing lengthy detailed suicide reports and by detailing the suicides of the much-loved politician Samuel Romilly and a much less popular Lord Castlereagh. Through reporting of political suicides, that historians have so far considered a mere demonstration of empirical veracity, Leeds newspapers informed readers about the particulars of the nobles' personal lives. Similarly, throughout the late Georgian era, double suicides were reported as romanticised sensational stories of love and loss, providing sensational content without 'deliberate' sensationalising, much like the assize reports.

Lower-class suicides were reported in a moralistic rather than sensational tone. Financial despondency of the lower classes was reported as one of the main reasons for self-murder in the early nineteenth century. Malthusian ideas on the connection between morality and poverty dominated press discussions of suicide, especially in the case of the moderately-reformist *Mercury*, which supported the New Poor Law and sympathised with the suicide victims only selectively, for example, on the topic of virtuous female suicide. A more sympathetic tone was used by the press briefly towards bankrupt suicide cases prior to the new insolvency laws, as those were committed by 'respectable' classes. However, the ultra-Tory *Intelligencer* began to sympathise with the lower-class suicides caused by presumed financial problems after the establishment of the New Poor Law of 1834. Despite their political differences, both papers highlighted intemperance as one of the main causes of suicide, pointing in a number of reports published from the emergence of the temperance movement in the 1820s and especially during its height in the 1830s to the influence of alcohol.

Throughout the late Georgian era, the press made suggestions as to possible causes of suicidal insanity. Explanations for suicide and the terms used to describe suicidal insanity were increasingly focused on the subversion of class and gender norms. Examination of suicide reports published by the Leeds press confirms Houston's assertion that suicide was depicted as mainly a lower-class problem. Suicidal insanity was also gendered, as newspapers appear to have been increasingly concerned with gender norms following the campaigns for Poor Law reform. Female cases of suicide displayed subversion of expected female behaviour, focusing on the notions of family values and traditional female subservience,

while male suicides were attributed to impersonal reasons such as financial trouble and intemperance.

Chapter Three: Editorial Commentaries and Miscellanies

Apart from utilising assize and suicide reports as sensational moralistic content, newspapers used editorial commentaries and miscellanies to discuss the increasingly popular subject of insanity. Articles on insanity found in the ‘Miscellany’ section of the newspaper were a source of light-hearted entertainment as well as information on the contemporary advances in medical research and treatments. These narratives and reports were often borrowed from legal cases; they were less critical of the upper and the lower classes and focused more on the readers’ entertainment. Although these articles might appear distasteful and offensive to modern readers, the national circulation of most of the articles discussed in this chapter suggests that there was a high demand for this material in late Georgian Britain.

Akihito Suzuki, in his work on the relationship between psychiatry, patients and their families in the late Georgian and early Victorian era argues that, in both the press and out on the street, people were fascinated by lunacy and were ‘searching for entertainment of a freak show’.¹ By looking at the articles published in the *Times*, Suzuki traces the ‘pornographic’ moral transgression of the upper-class insane, and states that insanity was a source of enjoyment for middle-class readers as well as a source of entertainment and sympathy.² The publication of insanity and suicide as sensation in the press was also noted by contemporary physician George Burrows. In his innovative work on suicide, Burrows warned that the detailed newspaper reports on suicide were attractive ‘tales of wonder and horror’ that helped to spread the suicide contagion.³

Stories of romance and moral digression dominated the ‘Miscellany’ section of the Leeds newspapers. As the middle-class press was overtaking broadsides and literary miscellanies in popularity, newspapers chose to publish increasingly sensational lengthy articles on the moral digression and eccentricity of insanity cases. Inquiries into the mental state of the Earl of Portsmouth and Reverend Edward Frank in the 1820s were published, allowing for great detail of the gentlemen’s personal affairs and insanity cases eccentricities. Apart from their sensational and humorous role, narrative anecdotes on insanity reflect

¹ Akihito Suzuki, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient, and the Family in England, 1820-1860* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 135.

² Ibid.

³ George Burrows in Barbara Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 42.

contemporary anxieties about the increase in insanity and, occasionally, concerns about the subversion of female gender norms. Following the King's illness, insanity was widely discussed and attracted both popular and medical attention, which sparked a concern about the growing spread of mental illness. Medical developments after the King's death, when the subject of insanity was reaching a peak in popularity, promoted public interest in mental illness. These developments featured in the press in the form of patient stories written by proprietors and, later, in statistical reports. By becoming well-known, yet feared, the subject of insanity was commonly discussed in both a humorous and serious way.

1808 – 1818

King George III failed to recover after becoming ill in October 1810, and for the next ten years, until his death in 1820, the press portrayed his illness as insanity. The King's illness was a subject of discussion throughout the kingdom; the papers published regular bulletins and updates on his health. In contrast to these bulletins, the press also published narrative anecdotes on the subject of, mainly, lower-class insanity. Such an eclectic combination of articles suggests that the King's illness was seen quite separately from the rest of the cases. The anecdotes on insanity remained popular throughout the period examined in this thesis, serving as entertaining humorous accounts prior to the 1820s; afterwards they became more sensational and served the same reader-drawing purpose as gory criminal reports and sensational political and double suicide reports.

The first entertaining anecdotes on insanity started to appear in the Leeds press in the 1810s, and concerned, mainly, female insanity. They were not as varied as the narratives that appeared in later periods, replicating contents of miscellanies and broadsides. As in the assizes column, one of the main themes among the stories on insanity during the regency period was romance. A story of a young lady from Bath, published by the *Mercury* in 1812, described a heroic woman who left her parents to embark on a quest to find a gentleman confined in an asylum in Shropshire.⁴ The *Mercury* narrated the story of a young woman, referring to her as 'our heroine', and gave a very detailed account of the events in the third person. The story, entitled 'A Tale of Mystery', was published nationally before it became

⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 1 August 1812.

known that the account given by the lady was contradictory.⁵ She did not make any inquiries to Shropshire asylums, nor did she ever properly meet the man she described as her lover, whom she, apparently, only saw once in public.⁶ The story about the lady in search of her insane lover captured readers' imaginations and their desire for a romantic and charitable tale. Such a depiction is hardly surprising; emphasis on emotion in print was characteristic of the Romantic era, while evangelical philanthropy was one of the ways the middle classes could distinguish themselves from the lower and upper classes. Gradually, the lady in the story came to be seen as the victim; her own mental alertness was under suspicion, and her background became a curious mystery. Such a depiction was typical of anecdotes about the female insane, and images of the passive female insane were published nation-wide.

From the late 1810s, when the interest in insanity was starting to peak, Leeds newspapers increasingly copied nationally circulated sensational anecdotal material, replicating 'Miscellany' articles found in broadsides and literary miscellanies. The *Intelligencer* published an example of such an article in 1818, entitled 'A Ghost at Newington'.⁷ The article told a story of a 'ghost' in the shape of a woman seen by a number of witnesses before it was discovered that the 'ghost' was in fact a naked woman of unusual proportions walking around in hysterics; pronounced a lunatic, she was sent to the workhouse. The story was told with humour; the men who saw the 'ghost' were described as feeble and scared of nothing more than a female lunatic. The main subject of the story was a naked female body – a moral transgression in itself. The female lunatic was portrayed similarly to the infanticidal women in crime reports and the lower-class female suicides; the naked woman was helpless, morally disturbing and had to be removed to an institution.

In contrast, the discussions of the King's health displayed sympathetic approach and in-depth medical information. The terms used in the bulletins on George III's health varied: his illness was most commonly referred to as the 'state of insanity', 'Majesty's disorder' or 'derangement'. These terms were more respectful and, unlike terms such as 'despondency' or 'lunacy' and 'insanity', implied that a recovery might be possible and did not hint at manic disorders. George III was treated professionally, employing a number of well-known medical practitioners specialising in mental illness, such as Dr Samuel Simmons, Dr Robert Darling Willis, and, most famously, Dr Thomas Munro. The papers published the reports on George III's health only partially, as the full accounts often exceeded fifty pages, such as the report

⁵ Ibid., 15 August 1812.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 April 1818.

presented to Parliament in 1810.⁸ Health bulletins focused their attention on the King's mental health, almost overlooking the numerous diseases he acquired due to his old age. As one contemporary physician noted, the King's insanity 'forced the subject upon general attention'.⁹ The sensation of George III's illness certainly contributed to the feeling that insanity was on the increase, sparking scholarly interest in the 1810s and 1820s and, consequently, statistical inquiries and panic about the increase in insanity and suicide cases in the 1830s.

1818 – 1828

In the 1820s, newspapers, which replicated the content published in literary miscellanies, were becoming increasingly popular as the new source for the latest gossip and scandal. Articles published before 1828 satirised insanity and reported intimate details of the mentally ill. The idea of mental illness was present in the social consciousness, but, prior to the publication of George Burrows' 1828 research on suicide and insanity, the idea projected in these articles was of mental illness as a moral, rather than a medical, issue. The articles discussed in this section contained what was perceived as sensational and humorous detail. They also reflected the sensibility, anxieties, and views on morality of the readers and producers of the press. These articles, like the lunatic inquiries discussed by Suzuki, were also valuable as sources of 'freak show' entertainment.

The publication of numerous literary miscellanies from the mid-eighteenth century to the nineteenth, suggests that there existed sustained public interest in gossip, theatre reviews, criticisms, and the other miscellaneous content these publications provided. Monthly and quarterly publications, such as *The British Lady's Magazine* (1815–18) and *Monthly Mirror* (1795–1806), to name just a few, borrowed the best features, such as theatre and literary reviews, criticisms, selected poetry and parliamentary proceedings, from a range of periodicals and combined them in one publication.¹⁰ These magazines appeared in their hundreds, but few survived after their first issue due to their high price. From the 1820s, newspapers were reducing in price and their adoption of miscellaneous articles made them the readers' preferred source for published entertainment. London papers were the first to

⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 22 December 1810.

⁹ Dr James Currie in Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, 133.

¹⁰ James Tierney, 'Periodicals and the Trade, 1695–1780', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. Michael F. Suarez SJ and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 485.

combine borrowed material, original anecdotes and gossip in their columns entitled 'Varieties' and 'Miscellany'. Often these columns would bear no title at all, appearing as a compilation of varied material on the last page of the paper. Provincial newspapers often borrowed their miscellaneous material from popular London dailies, such as the *Morning Post* or the *Times*, publishing the same articles that, according to Suzuki, were providing entertaining spectacles of insanity to readers.

Articles on the insanity of well-known, respectable men occupied substantial space in newspaper print, and occasionally inquests into the mental state of these men appeared in the 'Miscellany' rather than in the assizes section of the newspapers, which was probably unable to contain such extensive reports. The space devoted to discussions of two cases in particular, that of the Earl of Portsmouth and the Rev. Edward Frank, is startling, and arguably reveals anxieties about the moral and social lapses associated with mental illness. When relatives of the Earl of Portsmouth made an enquiry into the state of his marriage in 1823, eccentric details of the Earl's private life made it onto the pages of over three dozen newspapers.¹¹ The *Mercury* described the beatings the Earl received from his wife, and his cruelty towards servants and animals. Among the Earl's other eccentricities, the *Mercury* stated that he 'had a delusive partiality for funerals' and expressed extreme delight at anybody's death.¹² What appeared to have decided the Earl's lunacy was his blindness to his wife's affair: 'But what betrayed a mind completely estranged from every thing as a moral agent, unless it arose from complete insanity, was his sleeping in the same bed with the Countess and her paramour'.¹³ The reference to moral lapse as the main indicator of the Earl's insanity suggests the connection between morality and mind within the early nineteenth-century consciousness.

Charged under a writ of *lunatico inquirendo*, Rev. Frank's case proved just as popular as the Earl's.¹⁴ The Reverend tolerated his wife's adultery to such an extent as to cause suspicions of his own moral standing. The papers focused mainly on the Reverend's wife's affair and his extravagances, rather than his mental delusions. In detailing his wife's affair, the paper told a story of how Rev. Frank's child tried to enter his parents' bedroom when his mother and her lover were there. When the boy approached his mother as to why she did not

¹¹ *Morning Post* provides the most complete coverage of the case proceedings, see *Morning Post*, 10 February 1823 onwards.

¹² *Leeds Mercury*, 22 February 1823.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 August 1825.

let him in 'she answered "I could not, I was naked."'”¹⁵ Various jokes interrupted the report several times:

By Sir R. Byrnie, A Juror – You said you could account for the conduct of Mr. Frank more easily, by a thousand other hypotheses.

Witness – No; I only said half a dozen. (Laughter.)¹⁶

Other details provided by the *Intelligencer* include Rev. Frank's fondness for swearing in front of his son and respectable women as well as his liking of the 'common girls'.¹⁷ The jury mentioned Rev. Frank's lack of respectability against him, and made a point of repetitively referring to the 'station and fortune' he had failed to live up to. Rev. Frank's sensational and humorous case inverted the values that stood at the core of nineteenth-century respectability, and his transgression of his status as a clergyman must have affected the middle-class readers concerned with ideas of piety. Both the Earl of Portsmouth and Rev. Frank transgressed the behavioural norms expected of their status. In her book on middle-class culture Linda Young states that when 'lapses in genteel standards between performance and morality were discovered, they were seized upon as evidence of distinction, justifying the status of the observer' and denouncing the person whose performance of morality failed.¹⁸ Reporting of the lapses of, mainly, the upper and lower ranks in the newspapers suggests the eagerness of the middle classes to set themselves apart from the lower and upper classes. As Suzuki argues, the cases of the Earl of Portsmouth and Rev. Frank were 'pornographic', exposing transgressions of elite members of society.¹⁹

The portrayal of insanity in miscellaneous newspaper anecdotes and articles had a lot in common with contemporary caricature. Early nineteenth-century caricatures were often based around anxieties about moral lapse. Lunacy was often used as a satirical tool to undermine politicians. For example, Thomas Rowlandson portrayed the King of Prussia in a straitjacket in *The rising sun; or, a view of the continent* published in 1809.²⁰ Satirical portrayal of social and moral anxieties was especially popular in the 1820s. The tradition of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Linda Young, *Middle Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia, and Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2003), 132.

¹⁹ Suzuki, *Madness at Home*, 122.

²⁰ Other examples include Isaac Cruikshank (attrib.), *Fox in Bedlam*, 1784; James Gillray (attrib.), *Cooling the Brain, or – the Little Major Shaving the Shaver*, 1789; Theodore Lane, *Grand entrance to bamboozl'em*, 1821; Thomas Rowlandson, *A Peep into Bethlehem*, 1792-3; Thomas Rowlandson (attrib.), *The Incurables*, 1789; Charles Williams, *A ward of chancery, & a commission of lunacy superceded*, 1807.

‘miseries’, originally initiated by James Beresford’s *The Miseries of Human Life*, was reintroduced with *The Tour of Dr. Syntax Through London, or the Pleasures and Miseries of the Metropolis*, published in 1820. The volume, illustrated by Rowlandson and Isaac Cruikshank, became hugely successful and more works of a similar format followed.²¹ During their 1820s revival, publishers sold ‘miseries’ as collections of images with miscellaneous content and no particular overarching theme, united only in their anxieties about contemporary problems such as moral lapse and cross-class contamination.

The satirical anecdotes on insanity found in the ‘Miscellany’ section of the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* display similar social and moral anxieties. For example, in 1825 the *Mercury* included a dialogue in its ‘Miscellany’ section, said to have occurred at the Derby Assizes. Evidence to prove that an apothecary’s wife was a lunatic stated that she threw away a large amount of supply from the shop. “I doubt,” said the Learned Judge, “whether sweeping physic [medicine] into the street be any proof of insanity,” “True, my Lord,” replied the counsel: “but sweeping the pots away, certainly was.”²² Such anecdotes suggest the presence of the disquieting ideas of insanity in social consciousness. As comic depictions of uneasy social situations, both ‘miseries’ and the newspaper anecdotes about insanity expressed deep-felt anxieties about moral transgression in a cathartic way appropriate for a genteel audience.

Principal medical historians Roy Porter and Andrew Scull argue that awareness and the fear of insanity increased following the widely publicised illness of George III.²³ Starting in the third decade of the nineteenth century, there was an increasing number of various publications on mental illness. Thomas Bakewell was one of several asylum proprietors to write a treatise on insanity during the first half of the nineteenth century. Following his first publication, entitled *The Domestic Guide in Cases of Insanity*, published in 1805, Bakewell began to contribute his *Observations on Mental Affections* to newspapers and miscellanies. The *Intelligencer* published one of his observations in 1823, reporting a story of a gentleman who, after repeatedly escaping from a lunatic asylum, promised Bakewell that he would ‘never run away again, and you well know that I am too tenacious of my honour ever to violate it’. After another escape the patient was caught and brought to Bakewell. The

²¹ Anon., *The Tour of Dr. Syntax Through London, or the Pleasures and Miseries of the Metropolis* (London: J. Johnson, 1820); Brian Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order, 1820-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 52.

²² *Leeds Mercury*, 3 September 1825.

²³ Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles*, 160; Andrew T. Scull, *Museums of Madness: The Social Organization of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 129.

proprietor refused to shake his hand on the account that the patient has broken his promise, to which the escapee replied ‘Sir, I did not run away, I walked every step!’²⁴ The popularity of these observations was considerable; they appeared repeatedly throughout miscellanies and newspapers. At least two other newspapers published Bakewell’s story about the escaped patient: the *Bristol Mirror* and the *Hampshire Chronicle*, suggesting that there existed a national interest in humorous representation of insanity.²⁵

1828 – c.1840

The 1830s was a period of growing interest in research on mental health and suicide, resulting in one of the first public panics about lunacy. In 1828, the work of George Burrows attracted a great amount of attention from medical journals and the press. The treatise was widely acknowledged as one of the first research-based works on suicide. Burrows’ research was followed by *The Anatomy of Suicide*, a treatise published by Dr Forbes Winslow in 1840. Both doctors owned private asylums aimed at the middle and upper classes and were frequently mentioned in the press as experts on insanity. Burrows’ work demonstrated that a worrying proportion of insanity cases ended in suicide and showed concern about suicide as a contagion. In reply to Burrows’ concerns, throughout the 1830s British papers published a number of articles on lunacy and suicide based on statistics, a novel trend that lasted through the 1840s. Interestingly, alongside the statistical articles, that were perhaps better suited for medical journals than for the middle-class press, Leeds papers also published morally educational anecdotes on the moral treatment of insane patients, an idea that originated in Yorkshire and was fast becoming popular across England and overseas.

In his 1828 work, Burrows criticised the encouragement of the ‘attractive tales’ of suicides found in the press.²⁶ Indeed, sensational details of suicides were a popular feature in the press throughout the 1830s. An article in the *Intelligencer*, for instance, announced the pre-dominance of a certain way of committing suicide in different countries, and the English, apparently, had ‘a preference to hanging’.²⁷ An array of reports on attempted suicides displayed a similar interest in gory and sensational details. Some of these reports focused on the visual spectacle of the occurrences; for example, one report was graphically entitled

²⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 March 1823.

²⁵ *Bristol Mirror*, 15 February 1823; *Hampshire Chronicle*, 17 March 1823.

²⁶ Eleanor Fitzsimons, ‘Deadly Sensationalism’, *History Ireland* 21, no. 5 (2013): 33.

²⁷ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 4 August 1831.

‘Attempted Suicide by Hanging and Roasting’.²⁸ Other reports on attempted suicide focused on the perceived emotional state of the perpetrator. A ‘very respectable attired female’ was said to have suddenly thrown off her cloak and plunged into the river. The woman was tormented by her lover’s disappearance, and, when saved, she ‘loudly exclaimed’ that she has ‘already seen enough of this world’.²⁹ Just as the public hungrily consumed gory crime reports, which acted as the morbid literary equivalent of the wax displays of anatomical curiosities, so readers must have enjoyed voyeuristic details of these descriptions of suicide attempts.

Ironically, the same crowd that found tales of lunacy entertaining also supported moral treatment, an eighteenth-century concept of moral discipline (as opposed to physical restraint) that started to gain popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century. In Britain, the idea of ‘moral therapy’ first became popular with the publication of *Description of the Retreat* (1813), written by Samuel Tuke, founder of the York Retreat. However, a large proportion of medical practitioners opposed the idea for another two decades.³⁰ In 1830, the benefits of a moral approach were further reinforced by John Conolly’s *An Inquiry concerning the Indications of Insanity*. Moral treatments were thus becoming increasingly popular not only in Yorkshire but throughout the country.³¹ Local efforts at moral therapy were widely publicised, notably in the figure of Dr Ellis of Wakefield Asylum.³² Other reports, such as a description of occupational treatment of patients in a Dutch asylum, suggest that there was interest in the topic at a national level.³³ Indeed, Leeds newspapers often borrowed these examples from nationally circulated periodicals.

From the early 1830s, Leeds newspapers published a number of notices containing statistical data on insanity, focusing on the numbers of patients in terms of their cure and death rates. Most of these notices displayed little analysis of the mental afflictions themselves, and, in the data from Wakefield Asylum published by both the *Intelligencer* and the *Mercury* in 1839, the only diagnostic distinction made was that between ‘lunatics’ and

²⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 12 October 1839.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1834.

³⁰ William F. Bynum, ‘Rationales for Therapy in British Psychiatry, 1780–1835’, in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen*, ed. Andrew T. Scull (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 44.

³¹ John Conolly, *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity, with Suggestions for the Better Protection and Care of the Insane* (London: J. Taylor, 1830).

³² A collection of patients’ stories in the *Intelligencer* described Dr Ellis’ practice. One of the stories described Dr Ellis calming a patient with a clever trick; another showed a woman able to regain her composure after being reminded of her childhood memories. *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 June 1838.

³³ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 30 May 1835.

‘idiots’.³⁴ These articles focused on morality and cure rates and the ratio of men to women deemed ‘insane’. Mental illness was, therefore, still somewhat distanced from the reader, as one of the notices concluded that a total number of lunatics was 14,000 ‘of whom no fewer than 11,000 were paupers ... taking the whole of England, the average is about one insane person to every 1,000’.³⁵ Although insanity appeared to be a growing trend, and was an increasing concern of physicians nationwide, in the above notice it was shown as a rarity, at least for the middle and upper classes. One notice was dedicated specifically to statistics regarding insanity induced by intemperance, arguing that approximately fifty per cent of all cases were caused by drinking. The article referred to lower-class lunacy and the criminal behaviour of drunks who were ‘supported by the temperate members of the community’.³⁶ Although statistical data published at the time appears to lack what we would perceive as medical conclusions, it specifically targeted the curiosity, as well as fears and concerns, of the reader.

A surprisingly large proportion of ‘Miscellany’ articles compared insanity cases in England to those occurring elsewhere. Some articles attempted to connect insanity and suicide causes with politics. During the widespread political unrest in Europe, following the July Revolution in France, the *Intelligencer* stated that ‘as far as the influence of Governments is concerned, it appears that suicides are more frequent in republics than under monarchical Governments’.³⁷ It was the *Intelligencer* rather than the *Mercury* that published articles on international suicides. The *Intelligencer* was conservative and pro-British, using suicide’s natural negative connotation also in the article entitled ‘French Suicide’ that publicised the death of a young ‘fanatic’ Catholic Frenchman. Another article stated that the reason for the large number of suicides committed by convicts transported to Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) was the inability of the convicts to deal with the moral weight of their crimes, as opposed to the famously harsh conditions of the island.³⁸ The *Intelligencer*’s support for transportation, largely an eighteenth-century measure, is evidence of its conservative nature. The issue of penal transportation was debated at the time and subsequently declined during the Whig government (1835–1841), which opposed such harsh sentencing.

³⁴ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 11 May 1839; *Leeds Mercury*, 11 May 1839.

³⁵ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 25 October 1832.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 January 1834.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1831.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 November 1833.

Conclusion

Following the last bout of King George III's illness in 1819–1820, insanity was widely discussed, attracting both public and medical attention. The press used articles on insanity as sensational, entertaining material – highlighting the moral transgressions of the upper-class insane and depicting insanity as a 'freak show'. Beyond sensational depiction of insanity, 'Miscellany' articles featuring mental illness also reflected contemporary anxieties about the transgressions of gender roles as well as developments in medical research. The anecdotal depiction of insanity, therefore, mirrored the representations in assizes and suicide reports, providing sensational and moralistic accounts of insanity.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to trace and explain the newspaper portrayal of insanity between 1808 and 1840. It focused on the two provincial titles published in Leeds, Yorkshire to gain both a regional and a national perspective; its conclusions suggest that both national issues – Poor Law reform, infanticide, the King's illness – and local issues – Baines' involvement in the temperance movement in particular – were informing the debate on mental illness. This study has shown that the discourse on insanity in the press in the beginning of the nineteenth century was sensationalised, moralistic, segregated, gendered and class-specific.

During the late Georgian era the newly emerging merchant and professional classes expressed their political and social aspirations through the local press. The *Mercury* and the *Intelligencer* were the most widely circulated Yorkshire papers between 1808 and 1840. The *Mercury*, edited by Whig politician Edward Baines, a supporter of evangelical Temperance movement, was a liberal publication promoting moderate reform. The increasingly ultra-Tory *Intelligencer*, on the other hand, adopted a more paternalistic tone towards contemporary lower-class issues. Thus, the two papers provide opinions of the two opposing political movements while expressing the middle-class values that defined the early nineteenth-century press.

Between 1808 and 1818, the public interest in insanity increased, due to the King's much publicised illness. The new discourse on the criminal insanity defence, triggered by a recent attack on George III, focused on reporting sensational criminal trials featuring attacks on politicians and violent domestic crime. Suicidal insanity was portrayed in a similar way – suicides of politicians and nobles received considerable attention. Double suicides were also becoming increasingly popular due to their romantic appeal. But the bulk of the suicide reports, which adopted a moralistic, rather than a sensational tone, concerned lower-class suicides. In contrast, the 'Miscellany' column featured sensational humorous stories on the subject of, mainly, lower-class insanity. By publishing such gory and sensational material, newspapers were competing with broadsides, which, prior to the 1840s, were the cheapest and one of the most popular sources on crime. However, the inclusion of discussion on the insanity defence set the press apart from the cheaper and simply phrased publications.

The period between 1818 and 1830 was characterised by a widespread concern about a supposed increase in the instances of insanity and suicide. The increase in insanity and suicide cases was blamed mainly on poverty and the lack of morals in the lower social layers. The lower classes during this period were defined by their subversion of social mores, while the middle-class press was increasingly campaigning for Poor Law reform. Female cases of criminal and suicidal insanity were especially targeted as those most likely to display the subversion of social and gender norms. These reports focused on familial dysfunction and digression of female gender norms, while cases of male insanity focused on ‘masculine’ issues such as financial despondency and intemperance. The Leeds newspapers increasingly featured moralistically rich material, highlighting lower-class cases of violence and humiliation. The use of dramatic, theatrical detail in reports encouraged readers to sympathise with the victims of insanity. These reports provided readers with sensational material while also emotionally detaching the readers from the subjects of the report. In the ‘Miscellany’ section, the articles on insanity often satirised the subject; insanity was projected as a moral rather than a medical issue, which highlights the extent to which late-eighteenth-century Malthusian theories were present in the British consciousness.

After the establishment of the New Poor Law in 1834, the moral critique of the lower classes became less sensational, but continued to be one of the main tasks of the middle-class press. The reports of criminal insanity and suicide were increasingly gendered: female insanity was often stated to be the result of personal problems and moral downfall, while male insanity was more likely to be a result of financial trouble or intemperance. The language used towards perpetrators was class-specific and those of a respected rank were more likely to be reported in a tolerant way. The criticism of the lower classes was especially characteristic of the *Mercury*, which continued to support the New Poor Law. After 1834, the *Intelligencer* became increasingly ultra-Tory, and published paternalistic material that was aimed at bridging the gap between the upper and the lower classes. Both papers were also concerned with the supposed increase in insanity and suicide cases, publicised by George Burrows’ pioneering work on suicide (1828). The concern resulted in the publication of a number of articles on statistical and educational information on insanity and its treatment.

Historians have neglected the subject of criminal insanity and its portrayal in the press while few have looked at the representations of suicide in newspapers. Yet it makes sense to look at the newspaper reporting on both criminal insanity and suicide simultaneously, as both were the representation of mental illness as it was defined in the legislature and, arguably, as

it was most commonly experienced by the public. More regional studies are required to determine whether other newspapers represented insanity in a similar way to the Leeds press, or was Leeds, an urban and industrialising area with a rising middle class and a thriving evangelical community, distinctive?

This thesis looked to uncover how the print media portrayed insanity, and whether it was a concept shaped by contemporary social change. The examination of articles published by two leading Yorkshire publications revealed that insanity was most commonly reported in three newspaper sections: the 'Assizes' columns, the reports on suicides and the 'Miscellany' column. It also revealed that insanity was a fluid concept, vaguely defined by law, which was applied liberally to behaviour that deviated from the norms established by the newspaper contributors. The press used insanity to demonstrate subversion of social norms, using it as an attack on the morals and contemporary notions of gender. However, insanity was also a 'freak show', a chance for the papers to report the most affecting material.

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