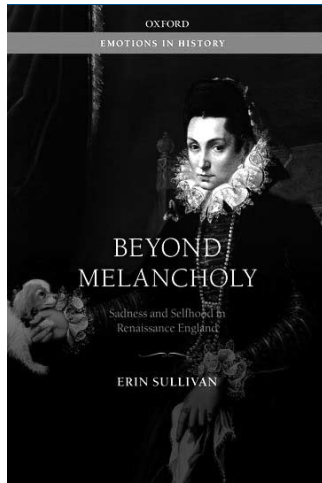


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England

By Erin Sullivan.
Oxford University Press. 2016.
£60.00 (hb). 256 pp.
ISBN 9780198739654

Most psychiatrists would probably agree that the current official conception of mood disorders leaves much to be desired. Two recent pieces of evidence support this proposition: first, the controversy surrounding the removal of the clause in the DSM-5 definition of depression which excluded the recently bereaved from attracting this diagnosis; second, the fact that the Wellcome Trust recently allocated almost £5 million to investigate the hypothesis that depression comprises several different disorders which simply share the symptom of low mood.

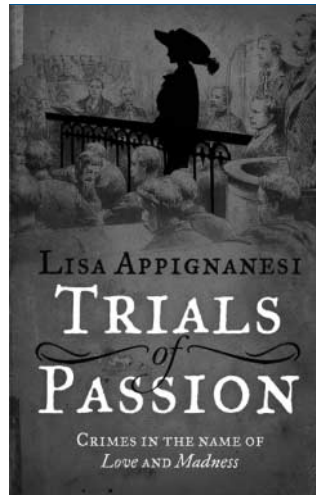
Thus, the publication of this book in OUP's *Emotions in History* series is timely. The author, Erin Sullivan, is a cultural historian and literary scholar at the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham. The title of the book implies both a similar premise to the Wellcome Trust's project and a move beyond Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). The book is structured around the distinctions made by Renaissance writers – literary as well as medical and religious – with chapters on grief, melancholy, godly sorrow, and despair. Each of these begins with a case study of each condition which is then discussed in great detail and with reference to a large quantity of fascinating contemporary source material. For example, the chapter on grief begins with the death of Margaret Radcliffe who died shortly after her twin brother, the bereavement literally tugging at her heart strings: an autopsy found 'all well and sounde, saving certeyne stringes striped all over her harte'. Two further examples from the wealth provided are the substantial number of deaths attributed to 'Griefe' in the 17th century Bills of Mortality and a consideration of the passions and madness – the belief that grief brought humans closer to animals and unable to think, ultimately leading to distraction.

Indeed, the profusion of sources makes this book slightly hard to digest for the non-specialist, rather like my (as yet, unsuccessful) attempts with *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. However, revisiting Burton, I am struck by a very pertinent comment: 'What a disease is, almost every physician defines. . . . How many diseases there are, is a question not yet determined'. This is exactly what every clinician does day-to-day, encountering the individual sitting in front of them and not being hide-bound by psychiatric taxonomies. This book has helped me further appreciate the

complexity of human emotions and has shown me the relevance of an unfamiliar period of history to my daily clinical practice.

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Trials of Passion: Crimes in the Name of Love and Madness

By Lisa Appignanesi. Virago Press.
2014. £16.59 (hb). 448 pp.
ISBN 9781844088744

'This is the story of crimes that grew out of passion, their perpetrators and the courtroom dramas in which they were enmeshed'. With these stirring words Lisa Appignanesi introduces her study of how the justice process invited doctors to become 'experts' in human passion, and how both the justice process and the medical process were affected by gender blindness. This is a road well travelled, not least by Appignanesi herself who previously published a book entitled *Mad, Bad and Sad* on similar themes.

In this book, she describes famous 19th-century murder trials, in which she believes gender role stereotypes played a vital part in the expert evidence. The cases nearly all involve the homicide of a family member or partner; what is sometimes bluntly called 'domestic homicide'. She emphasises especially those French cases where the emotions could be said to have abolished culpability, and how women's perceived emotional states could be used in expert testimony against them. Appignanesi uses these cases as evidence that the criminal justice process sees crime through a masculine lens, with masculinity as the norm. Inevitably, psychiatrists who act as experts in this process have a similarly limited perspective; in fact, they may be doubly 'blinded' because their concepts of mental illness and irrationality are also seen through a masculine lens.

Appignanesi claims that female defendants were disadvantaged then, and are probably disadvantaged now, and there are contemporary voices from mental health and criminology who agree with her. The past 30 years have seen an expansion of psychiatric services for women offenders, that take account of women's experience of trauma; an experience that may explain their so called 'irrationality'.

This is an engaging and well-written book, which I enjoyed reading. I was left with the question: is it really ever normal to kill someone you have loved? In a recent article for the *Daily Mail*, a psychiatrist took the view that it was 'understandable' that a man might kill a wife who had left him; but could this be the same as