

## *L'imagination* (1833) by Honoré-Victorin Daumier (1808–1879)

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France's 1830 July Revolution culminated in King Louis Philippe's royal ascension (1773–1850). Although primarily driven by the working classes, this insurrection was seen as having been co-opted by the elite. Accordingly, left-wing satirical journals, like *La Caricature*, provided platforms for political dissent, to which Honoré-Victorin Daumier (1808–1879) was an obliging artistic contributor. Daumier enjoyed a distinguished career, scrutinising nineteenth-century French society through paintings, prints and sculptures. However, during the 1830s, two of Daumier's lithographs scorned Louis Philippe's regime, earning him a 6-month custodial term.

Initially imprisoned, Daumier was subsequently transferred to a psychiatric asylum (rue Chaillot) for the remainder of his sentence. Notably, rue Chaillot was overseen by Casimir Pinel (1800–1866), the nephew of Philippe Pinel (1745–1826), a progenitor of moral treatment approaches. Although Daumier's father died within a psychiatric facility, to the authors' knowledge, no evidence proves that Honoré-Victorin experienced mental health issues at the time of his offence. Instead, the artist's institutionalisation may constitute an example of punitive psychiatry with broader connotations: only those with clinical disorders would lampoon the King.



**Image 1:** Honoré-Victorin Daumier. 'The Misanthropist' from *L'imagination*, 1833. Lithograph, 24 × 20 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

**Image 2:** Honoré-Victorin Daumier. 'A hypochondriac imagining himself being prepared for burial' from *L'imagination*, 1833. Lithograph, 24 × 19 cm. London, Wellcome Trust. Public Domain.

**Image 3:** Honoré-Victorin Daumier. 'My deceased husband gave me tickets, I had four winning numbers, I received a morning serenade, I am rolling in gold!' from *L'imagination*, 1833. Lithograph, 24 × 20 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum. Public Domain.

In Pinel's sanatorium, Daumier produced a 16-print portfolio, collectively titled *L'imagination* (1833). As the accompanying introduction clarifies, these depicted 'fixed ideas' and 'chimeras of the imagination', among other representations. Interestingly, several lithographs from *L'imagination* feature portrayals of psychiatric symptoms and phenomenology, perhaps informed by Daumier's interactions at rue Chaillot.

For instance, a solitary upper-class man, the 'misanthrope' (see image), is accompanied by various self-effigies reflecting on or attempting suicide; one hangs from an Epicurean-like bust, dichotomising suicidality and philosophical notions of pleasure.

In another scene (see image), a potentially intoxicated or delirious 'hypochondriac' slumps in uniform surrounded by images of his death, which may also suggest suicidal ideation and a preoccupation with mortality. Nearby bottles could signify alcohol misuse, possibly as self-medication for hypochondriac anxiety, and additional receptacles are visible, hinting towards medicinal treatment for an underlying condition.

In a third lithograph (see image), a woman sits in resignation, amidst impecunious settings and fantastical subjects. The caption explains: 'My deceased husband gave me tickets, I had four winning numbers, I received a morning serenade, I am rolling in gold!' Her stature betrays her bereaved mental distress and the presence of phantasmagorical figures might imply disordered, delusional or even psychotic thoughts, reinforced by the imp-like being whispering into her ear.

Daumier's lithographs could exemplify the concept of monomania, a then-accepted disease-model developed by the French psychiatrist, Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772–1840). Monomania was characterised by pathological fixations on a specific subject ('fixed ideas'); significantly, death is a recurring motif in these prints. Nonetheless, akin to nosology, artistic interpretations can evolve. Consequently, in the authors' opinion, we can now perceive psychopathological symptoms that could align with modern diagnostic criteria. Although professional opinions will inevitably vary, one constant theme emerges in these three lithographs: all individuals can be affected by mental health issues, irrespective of socio-economic circumstances and societal status. Thus, in a revolutionary epoch, Daumier's prints convey progressive psychiatric sentiments, denoting how mental health is a universally human experience.

### Declaration of interest

None.

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