

Reason and Unreason in Insanity

Michel Bénézech*

Retired, University of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France

***Corresponding Author:** Michel Bénézech, Retired, University of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France.

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Abstract

The former alienist doctors had already noted that the “insane” can sometimes commit acts of wisdom and that the reasonable person can occasionally commit acts of madness. The present study recalls three famous classic French treatises on the civil and penal capacity of the mentally ill and on the power of nuisance of the insane whose psychic abnormality remains unknown to those around them. They are *La folie lucide*, by Ulysse Trélat (1861), *La raison dans la folie*, by Victor Parant (1888) and *La raison chez les fous*, by Paul Voivenel (1926).

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Introduction

Here is a theoretical and practical problem, much forgotten in the teaching of contemporary forensic psychiatry, but which remains and will remain topical. To what extent can a person suffering from more or less severe mental disorders, sometimes hidden or hidden, give relevant advice or take “reasonable” decisions concerning himself and/or his family, his relatives, his business, his profession? Remember that article 414-1 of the Civil Code provides: “To do a valid act, you must be sane. It is for those who act in nullity for this reason to prove the existence of a mental disorder at the time of the act. However, the delinquent mental patient remains civilly liable, as specified in article 414-3 of the same code: empire of a mental disorder is nonetheless obliged to repair”.

The former alienists, authors of works in forensic psychiatry, were very interested in the civil and penal capacity of more or less serious mental patients and in the possible nuisance power of those whose psychic abnormalities remain unknown to those around them. We could cite Pinel’s unread mania (1801), Prichard’s moral folly (1835), Esquirol’s reasoning monomania (1838), Campagne’s reasoning mania (1869), Charpentier’s studies (1893) and Marandon de Montyel (1895) on the follies of character. More recently, the classic Raynier and Beaudouin (1950) devoted another 30 pages (452 - 482) to the legal situations of “non-prohibited or internal aliens” [4]. We will content ourselves with recalling here three famous classic treatises which appeared successively in 1861, 1888 and 1926.

Lucid madness (Ulysse Trélat, 1861)

In his 357-page book [5], Doctor Trélat (1795 - 1879), a doctor at the Hospice de la Salpêtrière, observes that there are some easily alienated identify, recognize and whose reasonable behaviour is predictable and obvious to all. In this situation, the doctor must simply help their spouses, their families to endure their difficulties and to take the necessary precautions, in particular by initiating an intern-

ment procedure (law of 1838). But everything is not always so simple, because the mental disorders of some of these patients go unnoticed by those around them.

Let us hear in his foreword (page XXX): “The sick which will be described had not been specially studied enough. Lucid aliens, despite their unreason, answer exactly to the questions put to them, do not appear alienated to superficial observers and often do not allow themselves to be penetrated and guessed. than in private life. There, they are more harmful, all the more dangerous, since the people who suffer from their presence do not find, for a long time, any sympathy, no point of support outside. How can we believe in the persecutions, in the violence of those who show so much politeness and so much gentleness in their relationships? This is the reasoning we pay for, and the truth is only recognized when it is not time. It is not only people of the world who are mistaken in such circumstances, but even doctors...”

Ulysse Trélat then reviews the different categories of difficult or especially difficult to recognize. He devotes thirteen chapters to them: imbeciles and weak in intelligence, satyrs and nymphomaniacs, monomaniacs, erotomaniacs, jealous, dipsomaniacs, dissipators and adventurers, proud, wicked, kleptomaniacs, suicides, inert, lucid maniacs. He ends his treatise with various reflections: marriage to be avoided with lucid fools (disastrous alliances), the need for the intervention of the law, the emancipation of the strong and the protection of the weak, danger for others represented by the liberty of the “incapable” and finally, the medical consequences of lucid alienation: wills, speculations, acquisitions, dishonourable actions, proceedings criminals.

Let us recall that Trélat, whose existence was very agitated, was 66 years old when he published *La folie lucide*, his favorite psychiatric work. Written by Lunier, the book will be the subject of a logical six-page analysis in the *Annales Medico-Psychological* of October 1861 (3rd series, tome VII, 658-64). To this, by the way, let us recall that Trélat was among the thirty-five founding members of the Medico-Psychological Society which, under the chairmanship of Ferrus, held its first meeting on April 26, 1852. In his history of French psychiatry (page 45), Henri Baruk wrote of Trélat about *La folie lucide*: “...it clearly shows the danger of these patients who seem to reason so well and who, as a result of a falsehood and an immeasurable pride, deceive everyone and manage to create disasters and to constitute a scourge for those around them” [1].

Reason in madness (Victor Parant, 1888)

This is a remarkable work of 423 pages [3], the author of which, Doctor Parant (1848 - 1924), was medical director of the *Maison de Santé* in Toulouse. The subject of the treatise is clearly presented in its foreword (page 4): “In reality, madness does not exclude reason, in an absolute manner; this can persist, and it usually persists in various degrees and in various forms in the best characterized madness, in almost all states of mental illness. Certain alienated persons can, in many circumstances, without ceasing to be alienated, think, speak, act as truly reasonable individuals; in fact, they remain, not just appearances, but genuine parts of reason; with them there is a partial persistence of reason in madness”.

Here again, we can only give a very brief overview of this encyclopaedic study, rich in theoretical considerations and clinical examples. The book has five main chapters:

- “Knowledge or intelligence in the alienated”: persistence of memory, occupations, conversations, writings, intellectual appearance, physiognomy, activity and overactivity.
- “Judgment and discernment in the insane”: the outside world, self-awareness, discernment of good and bad.
- “The spirit of conduct among the alienated”: motives for conduct, protection from themselves, simulation and concealment of madness, pre-meditation.
- “The logic of the alienated”: formation of ideas and reasoning, logic in actions and in the evolution of conceptions delusional.

- “The partial persistence of reason in madness examined from a medico-legal point of view”: causes of errors in the appraisal of madness, civil capacity in lip service, partial criminal irresponsibility.

Let Victor Parant conclude (page 413): “In the end, there are cases where the alienated are shown to be so reasonable that one might not believe them to be alienated; they are nonetheless; also, to appreciate their condition, one must first of all refer to the sure signs of madness they present and not forget that, contrary to common opinion, one almost always finds a To varying degrees, the partial persistence of reason in madness”.

Reason among mad people (Paul Voivenel, 1926)

Unlike the two previous works, that of Doctor Voivenel (1880 - 1975), a freelance neuropsychiatrist in Toulouse, is presented as a more modest work, printed in large characters. and comprising 255 pages. There is no real introduction, no conclusion, no table of contents, no scientific references [6]. Written in a lively, picturesque, sometimes ironic, very literary style, this book has four parts, two of which are already public before the publication of 1926. Here they are with some of their most characteristic chapters summarized by us:

- “Reason among the mad”: Absence of arbitrary internments, myth of absolute mental health, error of magistrates and leaders, literary productions of madmen, resemblances between imbeciles and socialites, madness is a disease of affectivity, the most dangerous madmen often seem the most reasonable;
- “The keyboard of our emotions”: inner layer of our sensitivity, diseases by congestion of our sensitivity, impact of emotions on the organism, motivated constitution, anxious, shock-emotion, morbid fear;
- “Les mélancolies savoureuses” (published in 1919): motifs constitutional;
- “Female imagination” (1924 conference): intelligence, altruism, devotion, courage, transmission of life, protection of children, desire to please, romanticism, charm, modesty, shyness, intuition, nobility and depth of sensitivity, jealousy, cunning, revenge.

This fourth and final part pays homage to “the soul of woman” and its complexity.

The end of “The feminine imagination” constitutes the final lines of Paul Voivenel’s treatise, who confides in it: “My conviction of savage, of voluntary isolation - that is to say of motive - my conviction as a man who has never known his mother except to contemplate the photograph on his desk every day, is that the most precious happiness for a man of heart will always be to think, at the moment of render his accounts to God, whom he made a woman happy during his life”.

Conclusion

Should we end these brief and classic remarks, which we think are common sense, that is to say common sense, with a lesson in philosophy and spirituality on the theme of reason and madness? Let us then read Serge Carfantan in *Ce que raison veut dire* [2]. In this extremely brilliant and well-documented study, the author shatters all the simple, explicit, reasonable ideas, all the apparent certainties that we made our own during our scientific studies. and our life experience. For the high-level thinker, nothing is obvious: neither stupidity and intelligence, nor the rational and the irrational, nor reason and unreason, nor alienation and delusion. life, nor healthy thinking and sick thinking, neither clarity and confusion, nor progress and wisdom... All of this is true and requires a very sophisticated meditation, but practitioners of psychology and psychiatry are obliged to act, to intervene within a social framework which has its limits, borders, customs, laws and objectivity. If the “fool” can do acts of wisdom, the “Wise” can do foolish acts. We will stay there for the time being.

Declaration of Interests

The author declares that he has no links of interest.

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