



History, Digestion and Society: New Perspectives

Centre for the History of Medicine in Ireland

Humanities Institute of Ireland, University College Dublin

Friday 30 April – Saturday 1 May 2010

Friday

1.30 – 2.30 Registration and Coffee

2.30 – 2.35 Introduction Ian Miller, Centre for the History in Medicine in Ireland (CHOMI), University College Dublin

2.35 – 3.15 Panel One: Digestive Investigation in the 19th Century
Chair: Ian Miller (CHOMI, University College Dublin)

Rachael Russell (CHSTM, University of Manchester)
*'Surrounded with Difficulty and Uncertainty':
Nausea and Vomiting in Clinical Diagnosis, 1856-1903*

3.15 – 4.45 Panel Two: Food Refusal
Chair: Catherine Cox (CHOMI, University College Dublin)

Rebecca Wynter (University of Birmingham)
'One Motion, Dark and Offensive': Diet, Digestion and the Asylum, 1818-1854

Ann Daly (Independent Scholar)
'Fasting Girls': Eating Disorders and the Lure of Sickness in Ireland, 1850-1900

Saturday

10.00 – 11.30 am Panel Three: Gastric Illness in the late Twentieth Century
Chair: Anne MacLellan (CHOMI, University College Dublin)

Rhodri Hayward (Queen Mary, University of London)
Gastric Disorders and the Rise of Evidence Based Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain

Katherine Angel (Warwick University)
A Very Simple Answer: Causal Reasoning in the Last Twenty Five Years of Peptic Ulcer

11.30 – 11.45 Coffee

11.45 - 1.15 Panel Four: Animals and Digestion
Chair: Ann Daly (Independent Scholar)

Michael Worboys (CHSTM, University of Manchester)
A Dog's Dinner: From Scraps to Spratt's

Funke Sangodeyi (Harvard University)
Cattle Guts, Cellulose-eating Microbes and Livestock Improvement

1.15 – 2.15 Lunch

2.15 – 3.45 Panel Five: International Perspectives on Digestion
Chair: Rhodri Hayward (Queen Mary, University of London)

Adrian Zandberg (University of Warsaw)
'Dry villages': Local Alcohol Prohibition in Poland 1920-1934

Erik Loomis (Southwestern University)
Food, the Human Body, and Labour Conflict in the Pacific Northwest Timber Industry, 1900-1937

Closing Comments

Organized by Ian Miller and Catherine Cox and generously supported by

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Katherine Angel (Centre for the History of Medicine, Warwick University)
A Very Simple Answer: Causal Reasoning in the Last Twenty Five Years of Peptic Ulcer

Treatment for peptic ulcer was, in the 1970s, dominated by histamine receptor antagonists inhibiting the acid secretion that had long been the focus of etiological hypotheses. Psychosomatic formulations had also intertwined with the acid hypothesis - ulcer was, especially mid-century, understood in relation to stress and psychological factors. In the 1980s, the discovery of a bacterial association with ulcer led to claims that past speculations about acid, stress, and psychological factors, could finally be dispensed with. My paper will discuss this recent history of scientific and popular discourse about ulcer in Anglo-American texts. I will draw out inferences, in medical and journalistic writings, that the bacterial discovery – along with a famous self-experiment, and the relative success of antibiotic treatment - reveals *Helicobacter pylori* to be the sole cause of ulcer. I draw out a striking and repeated pull towards a monocausal etiology that sits uncomfortably with a rhetoric about contemporary medicine as multifactorial. I will explore how this monocausal emphasis provides a means to set aside psychosomatic etiologies that, since the demise of psychoanalysis in American psychiatry and medicine from the 1960s onwards, have been experienced as repeatedly in need of rejection. Moreover, I will use my findings to think critically about sociological depictions of contemporary medicine as a multifactorial, surveillance medicine.

Ann Daly (Independent Scholar)
'Fasting Girls': Eating Disorders and the Lure of Sickness in Ireland, 1850-1900

This paper aims to examine the prevalence of 'fasting girls' and its inextricable link with the mysterious and predominantly female illness the medical profession termed 'hysteria'. This was an umbrella term for a multifarious collection of ailments ranging from slight headache to violent 'hysterical' fits. The common denominator was that they were psychological and involved what we might today call incapacitating depression. The Dublin Medical Press and records of Obstetric hospitals noted the existence of 'hysterical' female patients refusing to eat. This paper will first examine the existence of 'hysteria' in post-Famine Ireland and then examine the medical discourse on anorexia. Anorexia nervosa was identified in 1874 by a prominent English doctor, William Witney Gull. The Dublin Medical Press is littered with cases of women who were actively refusing to eat but were not recognised as anorexic; rather, the journal identifies these women as if they were suffering from an organic disease. The refusal of food would ensure the patient was in a constant state of sickness, and – pale and gaunt, submissive and pliant – she would conform to the prevailing definitions of middle and upper class femininity. It would appear that anorexic girls and women offered the medical establishment opportunities to practise their craft and bolster the position of their profession by providing a steady stream of middle-class patients. Despite the identification of anorexia by nineteenth-century medicine, in hospital records and in this patient's disorder but rather defines it as a manifestation of hysteria and thus a cogent disease requiring medical expertise and intervention. Why did these women refuse food? Why were doctors so intent with supplying an organic aetiology to the condition? Essentially, this paper hopes to begin an exploration to the existence of eating disorders in Ireland in the second half of the 19th century.

Rhodri Hayward (Department of History, Queen Mary, University of London)
Gastric Disorders and the Rise of Evidence Based Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain

From the early 1930s British medical commentators began to complain of the growing incidence of digestive disorders across the population. By 1944, peptic ulcer was seen as a major problem in both the civilian and military populations. This epidemiological shift has attracted many different explanations. It has been attributed, variously, to new patterns of leisure and consumption; the increasing anxiety of a threatened population or the development of new forms of somatisation sustained by media interest and popular culture. Whilst modern historians have sought to read the mid-century increase in gastric disorders as an index of broader socio-economic and cultural changes, this paper takes a slightly different approach. Focussing upon the epidemiological investigations of J. L. Halliday, an early pioneer of psychosocial medicine, and the controversy surrounding the 1937 London omnibus strike this paper will examine how new gastroenterological techniques and psychological theories brought about the reconstitution of society. Although this sounds fairly wrongheaded, I will argue that gastric investigation in the interwar period made possible a new form of biopolitics – an evidence-based politics that, since 1997, has assumed a fundamental role in British government.

Erik Loomis (Southwestern University)
Food, the Human Body, and Labour Conflict in the Pacific Northwest Timber Industry, 1900-1937

This paper argues for the centrality of food in understanding labor relations in the forests of the United States' Pacific Northwest in the early twentieth century. Constructed in a notoriously shoddy manner, logging camps placed workers' bodies in peril through unsanitary living conditions. Central to this was bad food and poorly constructed kitchens. Loggers suffered from spoiled meat, adulterated canned food, a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables, polluted water, and food borne illnesses. Dining halls were located near latrines, food storage safety was rudimentary at best, and cooks often had venereal and other diseases. Logging camps were so poisonous and pestilent that loggers became desperate, looking for any alternative to improve their lives. Beginning in 1907, loggers organized through the Industrial Workers of the World. The I.W.W. attracted loggers by providing them a platform to fight for sanitation and safe food. By 1917, these strikes had nearly shut down logging in the region. Needing timber to fight World War I, President Woodrow Wilson considered this a national security issue. In response, the federal government forced lumber companies to reconstruct their camps and give loggers every health-related demand they asked for in return for crushing the union. The plan succeeded. Food safety improved through state intervention. Workers and industry institutionalized these reforms in the 1920s and when loggers organized into unions in the 1930s, safe food no longer contributed to labor strife.

Rachael Russell (Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of Manchester)
'Surrounded with Difficulty and Uncertainty': Nausea and Vomiting in Clinical Diagnosis, 1856-1903

In 1886 F.P. Atkinson complained in the Practitioner that 'there are few disorders which cause more discomfort and distress than those accompanied with incessant attacks of vomiting, and there are few which try more the skill and patience of the practitioner.'

Experiences of nausea and vomiting were problematic for sufferer and medical practitioner alike; they could equally signal innocuous disorders, chronic internal dysfunctions or acute infectious diseases. This talk is part of a project which aims to refocus the history of medicine from disease categories towards medical and cultural signs and symptoms which mediate between illnesses. Using textbooks, lectures and hospital case-reports, this paper establishes the changing significance of vomited matter in diagnostic practices in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Microscopic analysis of vomited matter became standard in clinical teaching from the 1850s onwards and detailed examination of stomach contents was frequently referred to as a form of physical diagnosis. Symptomatology literature focussed particularly on identification of fungi - *sarcina ventriculi* and *torulae fermenti* – as these 'growths' were indicative of fermentation. However, whilst images of vomited matter were increasingly produced, there was open acceptance that most constituents had 'no known pathological significance' (1894). Drawing on historical scholarship including laboratory medicine, microscopy and physical diagnosis, I place analysis of vomited matter within the wider context of a shift from macro, qualitative study of nausea and vomiting (as universal indicators of gastric disorder), to the quantitative analysis of symptoms (whereby the vomit in itself became a specific diagnostic tool).

Funke Sangodeyi (Harvard University)
Cattle Guts, Cellulose-eating Microbes and Livestock Improvement

My paper focuses on microbial studies into cellulose digestion in ruminant livestock at the UK's Rowett Research Institute of Nutrition and Health and in the US at University agricultural experiment stations in the 1940s-1950s. I will examine how the problem of cellulose digestion in cattle came to be of scientific, industrial and political interest, and how the problem was addressed by a group of agricultural and government animal scientists and bacteriologists in the UK and the United States after World War II. In the wake of the second world war, increasing attention was paid to ruminant digestion. The war had disrupted the livestock production industry in Europe; the increasing attention to nutritional needs of national populations and the importance of healthy, robust animals was the impetus for research into the digestive processes of cattle, goats, and sheep. Research efforts to this end were begun and gained momentum in the mid 1940s to mid 1950s in France and Great Britain while the US lagged behind. The focus of these studies was the "microbial flora" of the ruminant hindgut, facilitated via the unlikely conduit of an American termite. The development of a gut-focused microbiology centered on the digestion of cellulose was entwined with the development of an animal science focused on the improvement of livestock through the manipulation and study of digestion and diet rather than through scientific breeding. This story will be set within the context of the rise of nutritional science and international food policy in the immediate post-War era.

Michael Worboys (Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of Manchester)
A Dog's Dinner: From Scraps to Spratt's

This paper will look at the development of convenience dog foods in the nineteenth century, focusing on the biscuit products developed and sold by Spratt and Co. The promotion of the Spratt's Patent biscuit was orchestrated by Charles Cruft, who used dog shows and their prize winners to endorse the many varieties of biscuit. A main selling point was the health benefits of the cereal based product, not least in weaning dogs off their 'natural' meat diet to 'cool their blood' and secure their domestication. Spratt's also sold dog health manuals, most of which were written by Gordon N Stables, a retired naval doctor, who was also a prolific author of adventure stories and the inventor the travelling holiday caravan.

Rebecca Wynter (University of Birmingham)
'One Motion, Dark and Offensive': Diet, Digestion and the Asylum, 1818-1854

In May 1819, assistant naval surgeon, John Howe, was admitted to Staffordshire County Lunatic Asylum. On entry, he was emaciated and refused food, and was immediately force-fed. Howe began to eat well, and his diet was supplemented with port. His bowel movements were monitored for abnormality, and enemas prescribed to expel the toxins thought to generate madness. Using the case study of Stafford – a voluntary institution in the English Midlands, catering for all social classes – this paper will place digestion at the centre of early-nineteenth-century psychiatric treatment and the asylum experience. Diet was an integral part of efforts to rebalance the mind. Food and drink were used as sedatives and stimulants alongside drug therapies that either targeted or inadvertently affected the digestive system. Purgatives and emetics, like mercury and antimony, were used. Calmatives (mainly opiates) were essential, but caused constipation that required more medication. More fundamentally, food was a means to nurse back to physical health those with mental illness. Stafford had its own farm and purchased the articles it needed to meet medical needs and wealthy inmates' expectations. Nevertheless, the quality and quantity of provisions was considered of paramount importance to all. Consequently, food refusal was a cause of confrontation between staff and patients. Refusing to eat was a manifestation of melancholy, self-harm or delusions of poisoning, but could also be a means for inmates to regain control – if only until they were force-fed.

Adrian Zandberg (University of Warsaw)
'Dry villages': Local Alcohol Prohibition in Poland 1920-1934

While the history of temperance in the interwar period has globally drawn impressive research, it didn't receive much attention in Polish history. This is surprising as in 1920s Polish temperance movement was quite influential, and its notable members served in the government. Although attempts to introduce nation-wide prohibition failed, the pressure of prohibitionists shaped the alcohol bill adopted in 1920. Among other restrictions this law introduced 'local option', allowing the communities to ban alcohol sale and consumption in a popular vote. More than 600 plebiscites took place before the law was annulled in 1934, resulting in 'dry zones' covering about 10% of the country. This paper traces the incidence of local prohibition. Exploring statistical data it finds some common features of the communities which introduced 'dry law', such as their rural character or the presence of large Ukrainian minority. The paper attempts to give an interpretation of statistical findings in light of narrative and administrative sources.