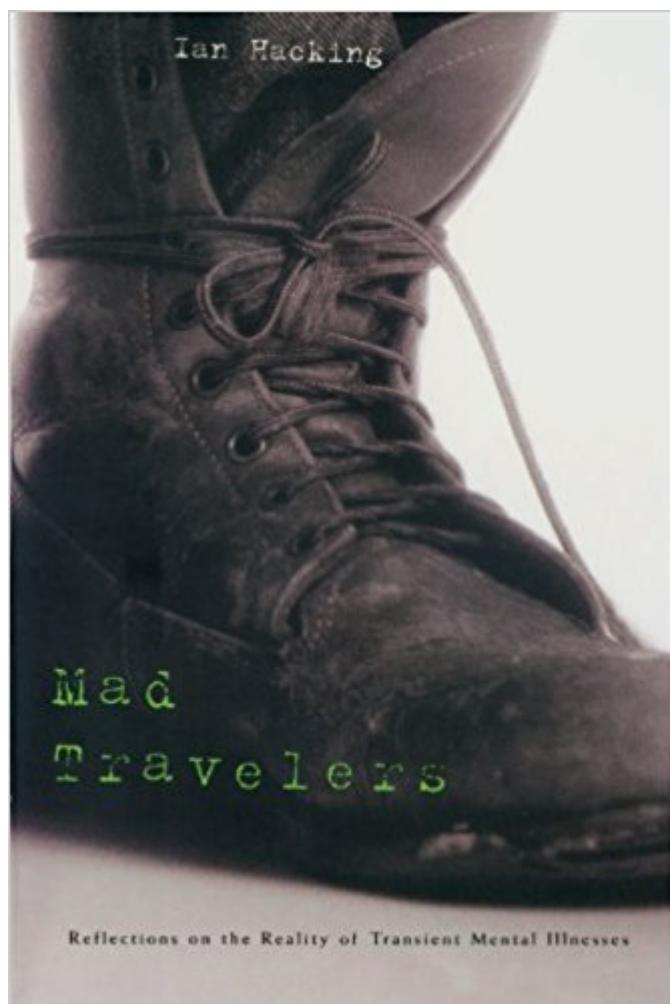


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Mad Travelers: Reflections On The Reality Of Transient Mental Illnesses



Synopsis

Hacking tells the fascinating tale of Albert Dadas, a native of France's Bordeaux region and the first diagnosed mad traveler. Dadas suffered from a strange compulsion that led him to travel obsessively, often without identification, not knowing who he was or why he traveled. Using the records of Philippe TissiÃ©, Dadas's physician, Hacking attempts to make sense of this strange epidemic. In telling this tale, Hacking raises probing questions about the nature of mental disorders, the cultural repercussions of their diagnosis, and the relevance of this century-old case study for today's overanalyzed society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The curious history of a now defunct Victorian-era psychiatric disorder is the jumping-off point for a reflection on the relationship between mental illness and its cultural context by Hacking, a philosopher who has written on the phenomenon of multiple personality disorder (Rewriting the Soul). In a series of four essays originally delivered as the 1997 Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, Hacking closely analyzes the history of the dissociative fugue, a malady that enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1890s, particularly in France. Its symptom was compulsive bouts of walking in a state of complete forgetfulness of one's identity. The most celebrated fugueur was one Albert Dadas, a young gasworker from Bordeaux whose walks of up to 70 km a day took him as far afield as Algeria and Russia. By 1909, the disorder had all but vanished from the attention of the medical community, effaced by the demise of the hysteria diagnosis of which it was a subset. In this thoughtful but sometimes tiresomely discursive volume, Hacking analyzes the "ecological niche"

that briefly allowed this illness and its diagnosis to flourish, combining details from the political and social contexts in which it was embedded along with excerpts from the doctor's chronicles of the Dadas case and anecdotes from medical history reaching from ancient Greece to the present. It would behoove us, Hacking writes, to think about how some of today's hot diagnoses?multiple personality disorder, PMS, ADD?might be equally niche-dependent. Yet, in his view, that would make them no less real. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Why do some mental illnesses flourish in certain times and places but later disappear? Reflecting on what he terms transient mental illness, philosopher-historian Hacking (Toronto: Rewriting the Soul, LJ 4/1/95) explores the diagnosis of fugue, an illness characterized by compulsive wandering and loss of memory, which was widely reported in late 19th-century western Europe. Philippe Tissie, an intern at Bordeaux Hospital, described the first case of fugue in 1887. In four lectures, Hacking discusses the relationship between Tissie and Albert Dadas (his subject) along with such associated topics as vagrancy, tourism, hypnosis, and the politics of contemporary European psychiatry. Though it can be difficult to follow (over half the text comprises notes, documents, and supplementary essays), this book is recommended for large academic or public libraries where there is an interest in the history of psychiatry. ALucille M. Boone, San Jose P.L., CACopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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