

Preface

“What, then, are man’s truths ultimately?
They are the irrefutable errors of man”.

F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, III, §265

I On a History of Epilepsy

It has been more than 40 years since the second, revised edition of Owsei Temkin’s monumental *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (1971). Temkin’s 1971 book – let alone its first 1945 version – has been a unique and outstanding contribution to the history of medicine. For, it was the first systematic attempt to write a history of epilepsy; that is, it was the first systematic attempt to write the history of one of the most ambivalent and puzzling diseases, which obfuscated and muddled its ambitious healers concerning its cause and its remedy, concerning its very status as a phenomenon. In fact, since the 1970s, following a well-established tradition in the philosophy and history of science (Boris Hessen, Thomas S. Kuhn), under the influence, among others, of the French epistemology (mainly, Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré and Georges Canguilhem) and the major works of both Michel Foucault and Roy Porter on the history of medicine and madness, a great many books and articles have been written on the social and cultural history of medicine, the history of psychiatry and madness, the evolution of various physical and mental disorders, the historical course of the hospital, the role of the patient and the role of the doctor.

Despite this literally enormous flow of works on medicine and psychiatry, a few works have been written on neurology and epilepsy and, especially, on epilepsy’s development after the major neurological turn regarding its diagnosis and treatment, that is, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, whereas only but a few have succeeded in moving beyond the, until the 1960s, dominant linear, positivist historical accounts. Besides, most of these works on the history of epilepsy and the history of neurology share some features that seem to us quite problematic from a historical perspective. To begin with, several studies tend to focus mainly on

the narration of epilepsy's course throughout history and of neurology's history that cumulatively led to the emergence of modern neurosciences, as well as on the history of epileptic therapy and the major therapeutic breakthroughs. Accordingly, some works proceed to a comparative analysis not only between past and present therapeutic measures, but also between epilepsy and other nineteenth-century mental and psychic disorders, from a strictly medical, that is, neurological and neurosurgical, point of view; namely, they try to illustrate the historical evolution of specific neurological and psychiatric terms, to explain their differentiation compared with twenty-first-century terms, as well as to delineate the historical evolution of neurological and mental symptoms and disorders (Scott 1993; Greenblatt et al. 1997; Eadie and Bladin 2001; Schneble 2003; Berrios 2012). Despite the indisputable worth of these studies, the choice of their research topic can be easily explained by the fact that the majority of these works is written by neurologists, neuroscientists and psychiatrists, who tend to present a rather linear narration of epilepsy's and neurology's scientific evolution. Only but a few works have been written by historians and sociologists of medicine, such as those focusing – especially, after Roy Porter's 1985 key-article “The patient's view. Doing medical history from below” – on the illustration of the role of the neurological and, in some cases, the epileptic patient, and those focusing on epilepsy's lived experience (Schneider and Conrad 1983; Porter 1985; Scambler 1989; Casper 2012; Dwyer 2012). Nonetheless, the most significant omission that should be stressed is the fact that almost none of them is approaching the social history of neurology and, more specifically, the social history of epilepsy, through the historical examination and analysis of the archival sources; namely, through the use of the invaluable treasure of hospital records and epileptic patients' medical files. It is exactly these specific gaps that this book aspires to fill.

II Outline of the Chapters

Having the exceptional opportunity to visit as a Marie Curie fellow the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic (today, National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery), namely, the world's first neurological hospital, I explored the heretofore uncharted and especially rich and detailed archives of the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic.¹ More specifically, along with my research at the Wellcome Library for the History of Medicine – that is, one of the world's leading libraries in the history of medicine – I examined the medical files of the epileptic patients who were hospitalized at the National Hospital and treated by John Hughlings Jackson (1835–1911), the “Father of British neurology”, during the

¹ My research was conducted during my six-month stay in London as a fellow at University College London (1 October 2007–31 March 2008). The fellowship was part of the Marie Curie Fellowships for Early Stage Training – Sixth Framework Programme: “Building on the Past: European Doctorate in the Social History of Europe and the Mediterranean”.

period 1870–1895.² On the whole, during this period of 25 years, there was recorded the physical examination and indoor treatment of Jackson’s 1,453 patients. From these 1,453 inpatients, 371 were clearly defined as epileptics or as suffering from (epileptic/epileptiform) fits. Within this frame, this book focuses on an analytics of the first systematic, scientific discourse on epilepsy and epileptics, as it was elaborated by the leading figure of nineteenth-century British neurology within the walls of a pioneer neurological institution, in order to delineate its multilevel and multidimensional repercussions – social and political, epistemological and cultural – within the historical context of late Victorian England.

From this perspective, after a short introduction into the subject and the book’s basic methodological tools in Chap. 1, Chap. 2 “‘Bodies That Matter’: Living in the Nineteenth Century” aims at presenting the general historical conditions, in which neurology emerged as a distinct scientific field. Within this frame, it briefly describes the social, political and economic conditions in nineteenth-century English society, with a special emphasis on medicine’s development. Subsequently, it attempts to delineate the evolution of epilepsy’s treatment and perception from classical Antiquity until the first half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3, entitled “Unrolling the Archives’ Thread: Epilepsy and Epileptics at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic”, focuses on the chronological presentation of John Hughlings Jackson’s epileptic patients’ medical files. This quantitative analysis is divided into four main subperiods in order to enable the reader to follow the evolution, as well as the changes and transformations, regarding epilepsy’s recording and treatment at the National Hospital, during the period 1870–1895.

Chapter 4 “Discovering Epilepsy and Epileptics in Victorian London”, which could be called the “sociological” part of the book, focuses on the elaboration of these archival elements that will enable us to construct – or, more precisely, to reconstruct – the sociology of epileptics in nineteenth-century England and, in particular, in nineteenth-century London. Among other things, the detailed analysis of epileptic patients’ gender, age, marital status, occupation, address of residence, as well as of the very few references to their thoughts and feelings during hospitalization will prove significantly valuable to this direction. Accordingly, it would be useful to compare the archives of the public/charitable National Hospital with the archives of the two private asylums that were examined, the Manor House Asylum and the Holloway Sanatorium, while it would be undoubtedly necessary to inscribe the aforementioned elements within the broader context of the period under examination, among others, through the analysis of nineteenth-century medical, as well as non-medical, texts. The rapidly expanding and industrialized state apparatus of Victorian England, the rise of a middle class that was based upon the ideals of meritocracy, the decline of agriculture and the consequent urbanization of the British population, the state’s growing interest in public health reform and the simultaneous

²The medical records of the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic are currently located at the Rockefeller Medical Library, Institute of Neurology, University College London (Queen Square, London).

deterioration of the lower social classes' living conditions are all distinctly significant factors that should be juxtaposed, in order to look into epilepsy's identities and identify epileptics' status.

In direct correlation, Chap. 5, entitled "Epilepsy in the Age of Neurology", could be defined as the "epistemological" part of the book, since it focuses on another level of the archival elements. More particularly, the time between epilepsy's first manifestation (that is, as a rule, the first epileptic seizure) and patients' admission to the National Hospital, the length of their stay, the prescribed treatment, the result of their hospitalization, and the strictly scientific and methodical analysis are definitely indicative of the major turn towards a more "rational" and medicalized approach, towards a strictly scientific and purely neurological explanation and treatment of epilepsy, which took place during the second half of the nineteenth century. Without doubt, it will be necessary to inscribe these elements in the wider social, political, economic and epistemological context of the period under examination. For, this new trend will also become apparent through the study and analysis of current medical treatises and articles, along with the juxtaposition of these elements with the two private asylums' medical files. On the one hand, the Victorians' obsession with science in general, and with medicine and their own health, in particular, should be taken into consideration. For, this transformation had as a result a notable trend towards the identification, record and classification of a growing number of diseases, during the nineteenth century. On the other hand, along with the emergent eugenic movement, the new naturalistic account of the human brain, with an emphasis on its solid, hierarchical structure, should be included in the systematic attempts to find, as well as to invent, new tools to legitimize political stability and social hierarchy within the rapidly changing Victorian society. So, the newly-founded neurology and its new object of systematic study and thorough examination, the (epileptic) human brain, will be the centre of our attention in this chapter.

From this perspective, what is going to be the purpose of this journey? Where exactly is it going to lead us and for what reasons did we actually choose this rough path? It is these particular questions that Chap. 6, entitled "Towards the Twenty-First Century", is trying to answer. For, it was at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century that medicine began entering into people's lives as a distinct scientific field with a distinct cognitive object. It was at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century that scientific medicine succeeded in, on the one hand, displacing the, until then sovereign, theological discourse and, on the other hand, consolidating its position as one of the dominant and most powerful, analytical and interpretive frameworks. Within the context of these historical procedures whose repercussions continue to be strongly apparent and perceptible in our days, it was the modern industrialized state that took under its auspices the protection of its citizens' health and the fortification of their lives. So, should we actually maintain that this could be seen as a form of "cunning of history" against Karl Marx who predicted that capitalism would lead to the deterioration of the working classes' body and soul?

All in all, the target of this book is to examine and turn the attention to the historical conditions of epilepsy's emergence as a purely neurological disorder, during the

second half of the nineteenth century. For, this should be, in fact, the primary question of a genealogical historical analysis. Therefore, our aim is the evaluation of the specific historical *a priori* that led, during the second half of the nineteenth century, to the constitution of a whole range of power-knowledge networks, to the construction of new subjectivities and new cognitive objects, as it was the case with neurology and epilepsy, serving new political, social, cultural and epistemological premises. Through the interpretation of neurology's discourse, through the reading of epilepsy's text, through the listening to epileptics' voice, through the analysis of the diverse "neurographies", this book aims at functioning as a "history of the present". In other words, it aims at serving as the basis for explaining the course of neurology and the evolution of twentieth-century neurosciences, as well as the condition of twenty-first-century epileptic patients; as the basis for the re-interpretation and understanding of the invasion of a variety of medical practices and techniques into the whole spectrum of our everyday lives, as well as of the difficult position and severe marginalization of every "Other", at the beginning of the twenty-first century – either suffering from a physical and mental disorder, or not. The understanding of the nineteenth-century epileptic patient will help us to understand, listen to and respect the twenty-first-century epileptic patient, who is crying that "I understand it now and *I'm* not afraid of it. But most people are unless they've experienced it, and so you just don't talk to other people about it, and if you do, never use the word 'epilepsy'. [...]. There's just too much prejudice so the less said about it the better" (Schneider and Conrad 1983: 153). More importantly, the understanding of the nineteenth-century (epileptic) patient will also lead us to the understanding of the twenty-first-century mental patient, the twenty-first-century homosexual, the twenty-first-century immigrant, the twenty-first-century homeless; namely, everyone that the dominant social, political, cultural and epistemological norms tend either to forcibly normalize, or to forcibly exclude. Thus, our hope is that the decipherment and interpretation of the ambiguous, to an extent, prophecies that the nineteenth-century oracle bequeathed us will lead us to our acquaintance with the twenty-first-century neoliberal societies, their trends, their cruelties and their biopolitical paradoxes.

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The National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic
(1870-1895)

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