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# **Psychiatry** in Pictures

## The persecuted

### Stephen Wilson D

Albert Londres was a pioneer of investigative journalism. Travelling across France in 1925, he managed to gain access to a variety of institutions housing people who were mentally ill, sometimes using subterfuge and often met with official resistance. His findings, illustrated by Rouquayrol were reported in *Le Petit Parisien*, and later published in book form by Albin Michel (1925) under the title *Chez Les Fous*. <sup>1</sup> His descriptions are compassionate and ring true.



Fig. 1 By artist George Rouquayrol, image in public domain.

What's poignant, is the persecuted madman. His madness gives him no respite. It grips him, pursues him, tortures him. In the night it lies in wait for him, it spies on him, it insults him. 'It' or 'they' are his enemies! They are in the ceiling, in the wall, in the floorboards.

— In the coal hole you see it there all black, sending me waves?

It never stops watching over him, it hits him, it pinches him, it martyrises him with electricity, iron rods, fire, sheets of water, gas.

He blocks his eyes, his ears, his nose, in vain! He always sees his persecutors. He hears himself being threatened, he smells burning.

He lives in trances, he sleeps in a nightmare.

— What? What's happening? Behind! There they are! They're here!

To begin with, he doesn't accuse a specific person. Then the phantom takes a form. It's an individual unknown to him, or it's a sect, a secret society, an association, a consortium; they're the Jesuits, the free-masons, the Salvation Army, an insurance company. They're the physicists. It's Edison, it's Marconi, it's Branly.

It used to be the devil. The devil's dethroned. He only works for backward peasants. Modern inventions have returned him to his hell, today's persecutor is the cinematograph, the phonograph, the wireless, the plane, the x-ray machine, the loud-speaker...

Remorse racks them. They accuse themselves of crimes. It's they who have caused catastrophes.

A man hits his chest with forceful blows of his fist. He doesn't spare himself. His thorax serves as an echo chamber.

— It's me! It's me! It's me! he repeats. It's he who was responsible for the evacuation of the Ruhr!

Their pain isn't always expressed in the form of excitation, their madness is circular, so there's a period of depression. At such times their suffering is mute. It's as if they were inundated. Overwhelmed on a bench, eyes exhausted and lost in the distance, their fault gnaws at them.

- Come on, Madame Garin, walk a little, go for a stroll, chase away your nasty thoughts.
- How can I, sir, when it's I who declared war! I've caused the death of millions of men. There isn't a more hideous criminal than me, I shouldn't be here, no, not here.
- And where should you be, Madame Garin?
- Doing hard labour.

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