THIS SOCIAL SPHINX

A “Crazy” Philanthropy in Books 3-4 of Aurora Leigh
GREAT BRITAIN’S SLOW MOVEMENT TOWARDS DIVISION
BETHLEM ("BEDLAM")
ESTABLISHED 1247 A.D.

- 1403: 6:3 ratio; shift towards “lunatics”
- 1556: Bethlem annexed to Bridewell; Bethlem only mental hospital in Europe
- 1675-76: new hospital built, holds 120
- 1704: galleries still open to visitors
- 1770: weekend “funfair” closes; visitors must have ticket and be accompanied

William Hogarth’s
“A Rake’s Progress” (1735)
BETHLEM HOSPITAL IN 1761
from Mark Robson’s Bedlam (1946)
1536: Henry VIII dissolves monasteries, priories, friaries (for financial as well as religious & political reasons)

1536: short-lived act requires parish churchwardens to collect voluntary alms for providing handouts; no begging; able-bodied poor must work

1538: City of London petitions Crown to fund hospitals for poor (after monastic orders dispersed)

1575: an Act prescribes construction of Houses of Correction (Bridewells), at least one per county; must install trades, workshops, & factories to insure work
1601: “AN ACT FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR”

- individual parishes now responsible for collecting poor rate, allocating relief
- materials provided for able-bodied, working poor: “out-relief” (primarily bread, clothing, fuel, rent payment). Consequences of able-bodied pauper not working . . .
- almhouses, poorhouses, non-residential workhouses for “impotent poor”; maintenance is legal responsibility of family, if able.
- collection of poor rates by unpaid parish overseers
1697: first workhouse formed by several parishes.

1713: one of first charitable asylums set up at Norwich.

1714: passes act distilling laws concerning rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars, & vagrants into one law authorizing justices of peace to lock up “furiously mad and dangerous” in “some secure place.” Prompts creation of madhouses.

1723: parishes allowed to set up workhouses & deny “outside” relief
BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY

- 1754: bill to mandate licensing of private madhouses fails.
- 1774: Act for Regulating Private Madhouses (licenses, inspections) passes
- 1792: Tuke’s York Retreat founded (“moral management”)
- 1800: Act for Safe Custody of Insane Persons Charged w/ Offenses
- 1808: County Asylum Act permits magistrates to erect public asylums where parishes can send “dangerous idiots & lunatics”; asylums become mandatory in 1845
KING GEORGE III’S DEMENTIA
from The Madness of King George (1994)
1834: POOR LAW AMENDMENT ACT

- restricts outdoor relief; must enter workhouse for relief
- groups of parishes unite to form *union* responsible for one workhouse per area (660 new *Poor Law* “unions”)
- theoretically, insane and idiots cannot stay in workhouse longer than 2 wks, but in practice . . .
- provision of food & wages must be lower than that earned by poorest able-bodied laborers in local community
BRITISH PUBLIC POLICY

- 1845: County Asylums Act
- 1845: Lunatics Act of 1845
  - tripartite division of *insane*: lunatics, idiots, unsound minds
  - all insane to be relocated from workhouses to county asylums . . .
- 1860: Criminal Lunatics Asylum Act: creates Broadmoor Hospital
- 1886: The Idiots Act
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
Does Aurora Leigh’s description of the impoverished individuals who crowd into St. James Church, Piccadilly in Book Four (4.542-601) earn the reader’s harsh judgment? That is, do her words ring with hypocrisy given her earlier claim that “poets . . . are still whole democrats . . . loyal to the low” (4.314-17)? Does she lack the very compassion and sensitivity which she earlier stated must characterize the true poet? Consider too her description of the rich characters who also appear in the church for the big event (4.615-709, 710-92), and her later report of the poor participants’ anger when Marian doesn’t appear for the ceremony (4.815-47).
What do Lady Waldemar’s repeated references to Romney’s “madness” suggest about the importance of the socioeconomic class hierarchy to this upper-class woman (3.442, 543, 560, etc.)?

Exactly why are the elite so opposed to Romney’s marrying Marian?

What change of strategy is Aurora suggesting to Romney in lines 4.1193-98?