

Psyche

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The Greek origin of the word psyche (breath) is well-known but psyche also referred to life as action or as soul, some special force or spirit which entered living creatures. It was as soul or spirit that psyche was adopted into the English words psychology and psychiatry but its exact semantic status is a knotty affair.

The first mention of the word psychology occurred when Pordage translated Thomas Willis' *De Anima Brutorum*. Mostly psychologia was translated as 'doctrine of the soul' but on one occasion it became psychology (Cranefield, 1961). The term psychiatry (literally treatment of the soul) was first introduced by J. C. Reil who also in 1805 founded the first journal of psychiatry *Magazin für Psychish Heilkunde*. Reil, however, was no mystic and regarded life force as the expression of physiological functions and considered psychiatry as one of the three basic branches of medicine, together with internal medicine and surgery.

In parallel with these developments psyche was personified as a goddess. The story occurs in *The Golden Ass* by Lucius Apuleius, a Platonic philosopher who lived about 150 AD and whose story has been translated in a popular volume by Robert Graves (1950).

Psyche was the youngest of three princesses but Aphrodite, jealous of her beauty, ordered Cupid to inspire her with a love for the vilest of men. However, Cupid himself fell in love with her. The jealous sisters told her that in the darkness she was embracing a hideous monster; to verify this Psyche shone her lamp on him while he slept and saw her lover was the most beautiful of the gods. Unfortunately a drop of hot oil fell on Cupid's shoulder; he awoke and fled. Subsequently Psyche went in search of him, found him and entered into an immortal union.

Psyche, like so many of the immortals, has acted as an inspiration for writers and artists. Granger's *Index to Poetry* (1962) lists under 'Subjects' four involving Psyche and it may be no coincidence that two of the poets were medically qualified. These are John Keats, who composed the well-known 'Ode to Psyche' and Robert Bridges who wrote 'Eros and Psyche'. There are several other poems not included in Granger's Index. A pictorial representation of Psyche by Ballista Luteri (d 1548) is in the Borghese Gallery, Rome, and shows Psyche being carried up to Olympus by winged cherubim. A work of sculpture showing Amor and Psyche by Antonio Canova is in

the Hermitage, Leningrad, and the wings, like those in Luteri's picture, are birdlike. A carving portraying Psyche, but no longer in existence, was mounted together with a figure of Cupid by the 'Celestial Bed' in the Temple of Health, Adelphi Terrace. This was an establishment owned and run by the well-known 18th century Quack, James Graham (Jameson, 1961).

It was natural that when psychology and medical psychology became established with institutions, they would wish for armorial bearings and it was logical that some representation of psyche should be incorporated. "The Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals of the Insane", from which our College is directly descended, was founded in 1841 and from 1853–58 published the *Asylum Journal* which from 1858 became the *Journal of Mental Science*. In January 1899 the title page of the *Journal of Mental Science* bears a simple device showing Psyche with butterfly wings and the words (in Greek) ΨΥΧΗΣ ΙΑΤΡΟΣ (soul doctor or psychiatrist).

A letter in the records now held by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and dated December 1964 states that there was no record of correspondence or conversation leading to the Original Grant, which was conducted by one member long since deceased. The College of Arms reported the work was carried out by an individual Herald and the College of Arms possessed only one copy of the Actual Grant. In 1925 a simple monogram of the letters RMPA surrounded by the title Royal Medico-Psychological Association is on the title page of the *Journal of Mental Science*.

In 1926 the Medico-Psychological Association, as the association had now become, obtained a charter of incorporation and permission to add the prefix Royal to the Association's name, together with a grant of arms. Lord (1927), when writing of the new coat of arms, stated that the looped cross at the top is an ancient Egyptian sign representing a divine mystery. He further recorded that Psyche in the flesh with butterfly wings as represented in the previous arms, had been much criticised and had been replaced by a butterfly, an emblem of the soul. It was further noted that Lampière had written that among the Ancients, when a man had just expired, a butterfly appeared fluttering above as if arising from the mouth of the deceased. Lord concluded the College of Arms had done their work well in representing Psyche and



Etching by Steinbruch after a painting by D. Pound. Mary Evans Picture Library.

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the staff of Aesculapius, together with the serpents representing General Medicine, all surmounted by the looped cross and its wings possibly signifying life's transience. With the new arms appeared a new motto "Let Wisdom Guide" which is said to be found in many works ancient and modern. From 1927-1933 the whole was surrounded by a double cartouche containing the title "The Royal Medico-Psychological Association" but from 1933 onwards the arms appear in their current form unsurrounded by any title.

When the Association changed to the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1972 the same arms and Motto were regranted.

Psyche has thus been an inspiration to many in art and literature and that which she represents subject to many interpretations. Today mind still has many mysterious and ephemeral characteristics but it is still closely related to many conditions in General Medicine.

Some psychiatrists would consider mind to be an epiphenomenon of brain function, many of whose mysteries will eventually yield to scientific and clinical investigation and most would consider the emergent subjective experiences as important in determining behaviour. The current motto "Let

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"Wisdom Guide" is certainly suitable whatever interpretation or meaning is given to Psyche and whatever direction psychiatry may take in the future.

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A full list of references is available on request from the author.