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## Haizmann's madness: the concept of bizarreness and the diagnosis of schizophrenia

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*Christoph Haizmann, a seventeenth-century Bavarian painter, suffered from abnormal religious experiences. Our study considers whether Haizmann's case fits the model of schizophrenia through the concept of 'bizarreness'. Haizmann's words and actions were discordant and bizarre even within the religious framework of the seventeenth century.*

*We propose that 'bizarreness' is an expression of relative deviation from the social and cultural norms of a particular epoch and that 'bizarreness' may be an important concept as an indicator of schizophrenia. In this sense, Haizmann was likely to have suffered from schizophrenia. Haizmann's case may offer a good example for the investigation of schizophrenia in history through the concept of 'bizarreness', an approach that can indicate deviation from ordinariness and commonness even in religious models.*

**Keywords:** *bizarreness; history; madness; psychiatry; schizophrenia; 17th century*

### Introduction

Christoph Haizmann, a painter in seventeenth-century Bavaria, suffered from abnormal experiences of a profound and religious nature from 1677 until his death in 1700. Haizmann's madness was described by Freud (1923), and was later discussed by Macalpine and Hunter (1956) from a

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psychodynamic viewpoint in their book *Schizophrenia 1677*. Jeste *et al.* (1985) quoted Haizmann's case as proof that schizophrenia existed at that time, while Bark (1988) noted that it was difficult to prove that Haizmann suffered from schizophrenia, as no record of thought disturbance or economic/social withdrawal was present, although delusions of persecution, hallucinations and bizarre behaviour were apparent.

The purpose of this analysis is to consider whether the concept of 'bizarreness' could usefully be applied to determine whether the seventeenth-century case of Haizmann fits this model of schizophrenia.

### **Life history of Christoph Haizmann**

It is unclear in which year Christoph Haizmann was born. According to his confession, while in a state of despair he sold himself body and soul to the Devil for progress in his art. While staying and painting in Pottenbrunn in 1677, he was attacked by unnatural convulsions and demoniacal apparitions. When questioned by the Prefect of the Seigniorship of Pottenbrunn, he confessed to having made a pact in blood with the Devil nine years previously. He set down in writing that he would be the Devil's bodily son and that his body and soul would belong to the Devil in the ninth year. Haizmann came to believe that he could be saved only by the grace of the Virgin Mary of Mariazell, a place of pilgrimage, through which the Devil would be forced to return the pact in blood to him. On 1 September 1677 the Prefect of Pottenbrunn, Johann Leopold Braun, wrote a letter of introduction to Mariazell to ask for Haizmann's exorcism, referring to Haizmann as 'this poor man' (Macalpine and Hunter, 1956: 58). Haizmann recorded in his diary<sup>1</sup> that he arrived in Mariazell on 5 September and, during the exorcism for the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Devil appeared and dropped the pact made in blood. However, the Abbot of Mariazell attested that none of the attending Fathers had seen the Devil – they only saw Haizmann hurl himself out of the hands of the Fathers who were holding him and grab a piece of paper. Subsequently, he started living in peace and writing his diary, and made paintings of his temptations and miraculous delivery through exorcism to express his gratitude. Figure 1 shows an example.

One month after the first exorcism, Haizmann suffered a recurrence of the convulsions; a cavalier appeared, ordering him to abandon the Holy Rosicrucian Brotherhood, which he had recently joined after moving to Vienna. During the attacks, 8 days after he first saw the cavalier, he was molested by an apparition of Jesus and the Virgin Mary telling him to 'go into the wilderness for six days and serve God, otherwise you will suffer in damnation'. He also experienced visions in which he was taken to Hell, where sinners were being punished. After seeing a well-dressed gentleman one day and wishing he were that man, Haizmann was intimidated by visions



FIG. 1. The signing of the pact and the redemption in the shrine of Mariazell; copy made in 1729(?) from Haizmann's 1677 original (by kind permission of the Austrian National Library).

Centre: Haizmann praying; left: Haizmann exchanging the contract with the Devil (disguised as a gentleman); right: the Devil.

of being tortured in burning flames and amid a terrible stench and by the voice of the Devil saying 'until you enrol yourself in the Hermit Order, you will suffer the pain of being flogged'. Haizmann decided that he should have the original pact written in ink surrendered, and he again sought refuge in Mariazell. His wish was accepted and he went through another exorcism in the church. He then became a member of the Order of Brothers Hospitallers. However, he continued to experience temptations from the Devil to strike new pacts, but only when he 'drank wine somewhat too much'. Haizmann died of fever in his cloister in Neustatt on the river Moldau in 1700.

### Identification of schizophrenia according to psychiatric history

The possible existence of schizophrenia before the eighteenth century has been discussed repeatedly. Although Jeste *et al.* (1985) indicated that the existence of schizophrenia is suggested by historical descriptions, identifying

such cases in the history of psychiatry is not easy. Hare (1988) stated that identification is difficult for several reasons. First, the states and conditions of schizophrenia are still changing, even today, and the extent of change in previous centuries is unknown. Second, evaluation and description of major psychiatric symptoms – thought disturbance, flattening of emotion and autism – are difficult. Third, the meaning of old terms may have changed, or vocabulary may have become obsolete. As well as changes to the original meaning of words, the process of translation may introduce further imprecision, making the meaning of words so unclear that attempted diagnosis becomes quite inaccurate.

In addition to the historical barrier, the culture-bound nature of psychiatric symptoms is another, larger obstacle. Cultural influences are unavoidable (Leff, 1988). Correlations have been observed between religious groups to which individuals belong and experiences of hallucination (Schwab, 1977). Consequently, careful consideration of cultural factors is essential when discussing abnormal experiences. The context of culture comprises several elements, such as society, religion and science, all of which change with the times. The phenotype of schizophrenia, with abnormal thoughts, experiences and behaviour, is perhaps especially sensitive to cultural influences.

Thus, in order to identify schizophrenia in history we should use indices independent of the context of a specific culture. Such indices should not be based on a concept that relies just on content, but on one that describes relative 'deviation' from a certain model. In other words, they should be factors which reflect deviation from the standard of those days and which would have induced suspicion in people living in that age. In our view, the concept 'bizarreness' satisfies such conditions. 'Bizarreness' of thought and behaviour has been regarded as an important factor in the concept of schizophrenia. For example, Gilman (1983) said that the term 'bizarre' 'acquired a specific significance in the debate concerning the nature of schizophrenia'.

According to a recent study of 211 patients with schizophrenia (Otsuka, 2001), the factors closely related to schizophrenia were generally observed in a group of patients who strongly exhibited 'bizarreness', and therefore bizarreness represented the core of the concept of schizophrenia. Furthermore, it was suggested that in schizophrenia, bizarre behaviour was associated with bizarre thought, and general 'bizarreness' was closely related to a category of schizophrenia and represented its core.

It is difficult in historical studies to identify negative and positive symptoms, since they can be influenced by the spirit and culture of the times. However, culture-bound aspects can be avoided if 'bizarreness' is used for identification, because this is the concept that indicates relative 'deviation' from a certain cultural context and, at the same time, it is relatively free from the symptomatic dichotomy between positive or negative. Consequently, 'bizarreness' may be useful in the identification of schizophrenia among the insanities of the past.

In this paper, we examine Haizmann's mental disorder, using the concept of 'bizarreness' to consider whether he may be considered to have had schizophrenia. This requires us to consider whether he exhibited unnaturalness and 'bizarreness' according to the social and religious climate of his day and, if so, whether this is an adequate indication that he may have had schizophrenia

### **Madness and cultural context of Haizmann**

Haizmann's life history was full of unnatural seizures, his conviction that he sold himself to the Devil, and his behaviour based on that conviction. However, such episodes were not uncommon in the period between medieval and modern times. As reported by Guiley (1989), the episode of Father Theophilus and his contract with the Devil was well known to the medieval public. The story, published in many different languages and read out in many churches, exerted a prolonged influence.

In the seventeenth century when Haizmann lived, many ideas had been influenced by the Reformation of the sixteenth century. As a reaction to Protestantism, which 'restricted the belief related to the existence of demons and abandoned systems such as exorcism and confession for preventing demonism' (Watarai, 1999), concerns about demonism were further emphasized by Catholicism. Bavaria, the southern part of Germany, was strongly Catholic, and artists were protected by those in power, including Archduke Karl II. During the Thirty Years' War, Maximilian of Bavaria joined the war on the Catholic side, but Bavaria was severely ravaged by war and the population decreased dramatically. Executions at witch trials were carried out in the southern part of Germany (where Protestants and Catholics were mixed together), even in 1660–70 (Mildelfort, 1972).

Religious visual hallucinations such as in Haizmann's case were often regarded as evidence of mental disorder. Kroll and Bachrach (1982) found that people in medieval times typically experienced visual hallucinations, while present-day patients with schizophrenia generally experience auditory hallucinations. They also found that visions with miracle cures occurred not only in medieval times but also today. Haizmann saw the vision of the cavalier surrounded by bright light, and some researchers regard the first 'white light' as a specific phenomenological characteristic of mystical experiences (Serouya, 1956). Conversely, others indicate the difficulty in clearly distinguishing between mystical and pathological experiences (Buckley, 1981; Roth, 1958). It has also been suggested that visions and hallucinations should be excluded from the intrinsic factors of mystical experiences (Moraczewski, 1971). Hallucinations with odours were sometimes reported. Ikegami (1992) found that in Western Europe, odours were considered to be of religious importance and were believed to originate from demons and witches.

Among the records about Haizmann, some instances suggest mental disorder according to contemporary psychiatric paradigms. First, there was a period of social withdrawal in his life when he was in despair about his talent as an artist and he lost his will to live. Even during his later years in a monastery he was still plagued by episodes, often after drinking wine, indicating the existence of a chronic condition. His belief that his thought and behaviour were under the control of a demoniacal contract suggests the existence of delusions and/or overvalued ideas. In addition, his other unnatural experiences, predominantly visions, were consistently in a religious context and appear to have been closely bound up with his beliefs.

However, these inferences ignore the cultural and moral context of the time and therefore cannot validly be used to identify 'abnormality' in people from a different age. It is essential to bear in mind the prevailing attitudes of the people who lived in those days. As well as the difference in period, there are competing religious and medical models. Some behaviours regarded as normal in a religious context may be considered abnormal from a medical standpoint. In western countries, this is probably true both in medieval and in modern times. For example, among the experiences of women in medieval religious institutions, occurrences that would be diagnosed as 'visual hallucinations' by medical standards were regarded as mystical religious experiences occupying a higher spiritual plane.

The question of whether an individual from the past suffered from a mental disorder in the contemporary sense cannot be answered simply by applying a medical model to the episodes described in their life history. Even if signs of 'pathology' can be observed in a historical document, such signs may not necessarily be associated with 'abnormality' when the experience is considered in the social and religious context of the day. However, if the experiences of the same individual were regarded as unnatural or showed 'deviation' from the contemporary religious context, it may be more appropriate to regard their mental state as having been abnormal.

Regarding the experiences of Haizmann, the dominant themes (the '9-year contract with the Devil and relief by the Virgin Mary') may be based on the popular legend of Theophilus. However, some peculiarities exist in Haizmann's episodes that deviate from the legend which was widespread among the people of that time. One example is that his contract was for 9 years, not the 7 years of Theophilus. In addition, Haizmann experienced a number of episodes that were unique to him: he agreed to sell his soul after his despair that his talent was gone; after the first session of exorcism, he was molested by demoniacal apparitions and underwent a second session of exorcism. There is a trend in his paintings for the picture of the Devil to change slightly in each image. This is unique to Haizmann, but it is similar to modern descriptions of paintings by people with schizophrenia. Furthermore, faith in the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, which was considered heretical, was a feature of his visions during the attack after the first exorcism. Some other

features of his episodes also deviated from the religious paradigms of the age, for example, the threats of punishment from Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and certain beliefs about evil ghosts and the violation of the Holy Trinity.

Schneider (1928) reported that religious contexts of patients with schizophrenia are reflected not only in their false perceptions and visual hallucinations but also in their expressions, attitudes, actions and writings. He thought that most of their writings were logically defective and often totally contradictory. Individuals with chronic illnesses often believed in miraculous resolution of the world's problems. Haizmann's episodes are similar to religious experiences in patients with schizophrenia as reported by Schneider.

We can discern how Haizmann was regarded by examining the reactions of people and organizations towards him. Haizmann enrolled in the Rosicrucian Brotherhood and finally also joined the Brothers Hospitallers. In the medieval period, local convents operated as hospitals and also served for 'those who are mentally ill' (Ackerknecht, 1967). The religious order of the Brothers Hospitallers was established by St John (1495–1550) and still functions as a hospital order. The Rosicrucian Brotherhood has its origin in a pamphlet 'Invitation to the Christian Fraternity', and one of their missions was to save the sick (from a humanitarian perspective).

Haizmann was not regarded as dangerous or heretical. Instead, exorcism was requested for him and was actually performed, and he was allowed to enrol in the Brothers Hospitallers. There is no record that contemporary doctors diagnosed Haizmann with any category of mental disease such as melancholia or mania, but he was not the subject of witch trials either. This might be because he did no harm to others in his social life and was not judged as using harmful magic. It was therefore suggested that Haizmann was treated as one of 'those who are mentally ill' according to the religious paradigm in those days and regarded as a person to be saved according to Christian dogma.

He actually embodied 'showy out-looking devotion towards metaphysical thought, concentration on religion, specifically, clear characteristics unique to people with mental illness such as being easily startled, fear, bizarre behaviour and demonomania', all of which can be features of mental illness (Lemke, 1958). Thus, his bizarre behaviour may have been regarded as unnatural within the contemporary religious context, and therefore seen as evidence of a pathological mental state.

Because of his evident bizarreness within this religious model, he escaped the charge of heresy, was pitied by people of religion and was recognized as a 'person to be saved'. Indeed, because the Brothers Hospitallers employed a dual medical and religious model of care, he might have been cured twice.

It is concluded that Haizmann's experiences and behaviour were noted as 'bizarre' by both contemporary religious and medical standards, suggesting serious mental dysfunction and leading to a caring rather than punitive

TABLE 1. *'Bizarre (deviation)' from medical and religious standards (Christoph Haizmann's case)*

Pathology observed by medical standards	Deviation from religious standards
1. A period of social withdrawal was experienced when he was in despair about his talent as an artist and he lost his will to live.	1. In Haizmann's episodes of contracts with the Devil, widely known characteristics from the 'miracle of Theophilus' were included (e.g., peculiar context of his original).
2. Regarding the contract with the Devil, Haizmann was adamant, and he believed that his thoughts and behaviour were under the control of the contract with the Devil (delusion and overvalued idea).	2. A 'deviation' of recognition presumably occurred between Haizmann and exorcists during exorcism.
3. When he experienced a seizure, ecstasy, absence and demoniacal apparition occurred simultaneously (ecstasy, consciousness disorder, visual hallucination).	3. The episode in which Jesus and the Virgin Mary appeared and threatened to punish him was a deviation from religious paradigm, even in those days.
4. Demonomania (phenomenon of possession).	4. He was forced to believe in an evil ghost, not the Holy Ghost, suggesting violation of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost).
5. The agreement with the Devil and visions changed gradually, independent of his condition.	5. Haizmann inconsistently incorporated into his paintings a variety of legends about the Devil (or Lucifer or demons); this can be seen in the changes in the Devil's appearance in the paintings, from a middle-class citizen to a monstrous figure.
6. He eventually spent the rest of his life in a monastery, and he continued to experience frequent events. This means that his condition was chronic.	

response. Haizmann's pathology was likely to be that of schizophrenia, or similar mental disorder. 'Bizarreness' is potentially a powerful methodological concept for the evaluation of mental states from historical sources.

### Summary

In Table 1 we indicate Haizmann's bizarreness from the point of view of medical and religious standards, and we summarize his madness as follows.

- (a) From the perspective of medical standards, it is assumed that Christoph Haizmann, a painter from seventeenth-century Bavaria, experienced numerous different unnatural events such as visual hallucinations, delusions and possession, and followed this chronic condition with social withdrawal.
- (b) From the perspective of religious standards, Haizmann's words and actions, such as the religious context unique to him, peculiar symbols and crimes not found in the dogma, deviated even from the religious framework of the seventeenth century. His life history was full of 'bizarre' episodes.
- (c) Considering that 'bizarreness' is an embodiment of relative deviation to escape from culture-bound phenomena and that 'bizarreness' is an important concept as an indicator of schizophrenia, Haizmann was likely to have suffered from schizophrenia.
- (d) Haizmann's case may offer a good example with important clues for the pathological study of mental illness, and particularly schizophrenia in history. There is abundant documentation, such as his own paintings and writings, and statements by other people, which have survived from the seventeenth century. His case illustrates the potential use of 'bizarreness' (= unnaturalness) in evaluating mental states from historical records

### Note

1. The diary written by Haizmann is in the Austrian National Library, Vienna. Macalpine and Hunter (1956) published the original German manuscript, together with an English translation.

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