



Hamlet Mental Illness in the Renaissance



Due to the prevalent religious structures of the time, many people during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance believed that mental illness was caused by the devil and his minions. Often, people who suffered from these conditions were treated by holy men who would try to exorcise the demons from the sufferer using religious rites and

artifacts. Sometimes the mentally ill were beaten or even tried as witches and burned at the stake. For a long time, mental illness was perceived as a supernatural ailment. This changed to some degree during the Renaissance as scientific understanding developed in Europe and a more humanistic (but often still brutal) view of mental illness took shape. Asylums for the mentally ill began to take in a growing number of people who demonstrated symptoms of mental disorders. Often, these asylums were converted monasteries or hospitals that became overcrowded, poorly maintained prison-like facilities where the inmates would be chained and sometimes tortured. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that the mentally ill would begin to be treated with dignity and scientifically researched methodologies.