

Book Reviews

One philosopher is constantly referred to: J. J. Rousseau, author of *Emile, or on education* (1762). His influence on eighteenth-century educationalists is mentioned in several chapters. Even so, the practical consequences, touched upon in Gerhard Trommer's chapter on 'Philanthropische Erziehung', deserve more attention. How were the famous principles applied, or not, in private homes?

All the contributors are eager to draw parallels between the eighteenth century and today; and Oehme hopes that we can learn from history. However, the book left this reviewer with the more pessimistic feeling that our society is not particularly friendly to children; and that modern effort and knowledge cannot prevent the mistakes and crimes that are committed against them. Oehme has an immense knowledge and understanding of the history of children and his wish to see that history in the light of our own times makes this book most relevant and worth reading.

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PATRIZIA GUARNIERI, *L'ammazzabambini: legge e scienza in un processo toscano di fine ottocento*, Microstorie 15, Turin, Einaudi, 1988, 8vo, pp. vii, 225, illus., L. 22,000.

Between 1873 and 1875 four children disappeared at Incisa Valdarno, a Tuscan village, without leaving any sign. Finally the mystery was solved: Carlo Grandi, a 24-year-old cartwright, living in the village, was caught while beating a young boy and on the point (apparently) of killing him. The corpses of the four missing children were found buried in Grandi's workshop. The quick investigation, which easily gained the confession of the alleged assassin and led to his indictment, the course of the trial up to the verdict, and the immediate medical and legal reactions to the conviction are the subjects of Patrizia Guarnieri's book.

The action against Carlo Grandi is one of the numerous "insanity trials" of this period in Europe as well as in America. As in the case studied by Charles Rosenberg (1968), it marks one of the first appearances in court of scientists debating upon the state of mental illness or sanity of the defendant and then upon his responsibility for the crime. But in this case, the physical deficiencies of the defendant (a dwarf, crippled, with twenty-one toes, completely hairless) seemed to provide an ideal ground for speculations about somatic signs of mental illness. The whole action was thus very little concerned with questioning and proving Grandi's guilt. Rather, it became a battleground for different definitions of madness: apparently the opposition was between an older conception of mental illness, conceived as a lack of any intellectual and rational faculty, and a modern idea of "moral insanity", which implied uncontrolled and unmotivated (even if not irrational) behaviour, often the expression of heredity or somatic malformations. But, Guarnieri points out, it would be misleading to view the clash in court as a mirror of the actual terms of scientific dispute. Through a careful reconstruction of the Florentine intellectual setting, the author shows the distance between the positions taken in court and those taken in medical and in legal cultures. Despite the psychological approach to the study of madness prevailing in Tuscany, where the deterministic developments occurring in France and in some Italian circles (namely Lombroso) received sharp criticism, the medical witnesses professed a rigid organicism at the trial. Likewise, the behaviour of the magistrates seems incompatible with the advanced interpretation of personal responsibility, based on a broad concept of freedom of choice and awareness, shared in Tuscan legal practice. The book underlines, then, the dependence of ideas and scientific views on political dynamics: in this case, the opinions showed in court were heavily shaped by the struggle to assert the status of psychiatry and to establish, over magistrates and mere physicians, the authority of alienists to evaluate criminal responsibility.

But besides the explanations it proposes, Guarnieri's book is notable for its ability to suggest that "other" circumstances, which will remain widely unknown, contributed to give that twist to the story. The narrative dwells on the different social actors involved in the construction of the accusation (the various witnesses, the examining magistrate, the defendant himself), tracing a profile of them which, without trying to be complete, clearly suggests the complexity of reasons

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underpinning behaviours and illuminates the making of the story. The account is set then into an open model of explanation which underlines gaps and unanswered questions, leaving the reader with matter for further speculation. In the way in which it is written, the book appears closer to a novel than to an essay, and it certainly succeeds in grasping in an unusual way the attention of the reader.

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STEPHEN GARTON, *Medicine and madness: a social history of insanity in New South Wales 1880–1940*, The Modern History Series, Kensington, New South Wales University Press, 1988, 8vo, pp. viii, 212, illus., A\$29.95, A\$19.95, (paperback).

Gradually we are piecing together the world of the asylum. Social historians have been attracted down those long corridors by the distinction of the pioneers (Goffman, Foucault, et al.) and by the interface that these institutions represent. This is where chaos meets structure, reason meets madness, and a threadbare medical enterprise tries to understand the roots of social behaviour. Stephen Garton's contribution is neo-traditional in that primary sources, casebook descriptions, and social control theory are used in parallel, and at times the data obstruct narrative. But it is a worthwhile book, providing useful material for any attempted synthesis of the asylum era.

In particular, Garton has charted a previously unrecognized shift in the pattern of asylum admissions between 1880 and 1940. From the single, rural, itinerant male, the typical inpatient became transformed into a depressed, suburban, family-based female. This may merely be a local, Australian, phenomenon related to changing population patterns in New South Wales. Gold-rush vagabonds disappear, an urban society arises. But "psychiatry gained sufficient credibility by the 1930s to allow individuals to police themselves", so there is also a story of psychiatry's coming-out, the acceptance of voluntary care as opposed to a police-initiated committal system.

There are some problems of course. Croton oil and calomel were not emetics but purgatives—Garton has got the wrong end, so to speak. The word "social" crops up so often on some pages that one starts to look for a party. The understandably naïve view of psychotic illness leads to assumptions about cause and effect—was family violence due to, rather than causative of, illness perhaps?—and overvaluation of the content of delusional beliefs. This leads him into speculative statements about the "construction of femininity" (or masculinity) which seem unnecessary.

Even without such sexological larding, there is a rich sufficiency of material here in terms of the high police profile, the prevalence of general paralysis of the insane, due to syphilis, the violence in the asylums, and the insight that it "was not illness that ensured committal but the breakdown of alternative forms of care and control". Most important of all, whether at the personal level or in the broader view, the difficulty of getting accurate details is immense. As Garton points out, "patients who answered 'Looney' or 'Turd' when asked their name subverted medical interrogation". Mad people will continue to be chief custodians of the prismatic nature of historical debate. Nevertheless, the delicate task of cleaning the canvas goes on, and this bit has been nicely done.

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RONALD BAYER, *Homosexuality and American psychiatry: the politics of diagnosis*, with a new Afterword on AIDS and homosexuality, Princeton University Press, 1987, 8vo, pp. vii, 242, £6.25 (paperback).

DAVID F. GREENBERG, *The construction of homosexuality*, University of Chicago Press, 1988, 8vo, pp. x, 635, \$29.95 (USA and Canada), £23.95 (UK and Ireland), \$34.50 (elsewhere).