

Book Reviews

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).