

academic press, and costs Australian readers almost \$200.00.

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Roy Porter and David Wright (eds), *The confinement of the insane: international perspectives, 1800–1965*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. xvii, 371, £50.00, US\$70.00 (hardback 0-521-80206-7).

Roy Porter's untimely death seems as yet scarcely to have slowed the parade of volumes appearing with his name on them. Here is still another, co-edited with David Wright. Wright and Peter Bartlett's last edited collection, *Outside the walls of the asylum* (1999), argued (not entirely convincingly) that the asylum was not as central to the emergence of psychiatry as a previous historiography had maintained. Here, he and Porter have moved back to a consideration of the real psychiatric "Great Confinement", this time in a broad international perspective.

The book's title suggests that it might offer a comparative perspective on psychiatric institutionalization. By and large, however, this promise is not kept, at least in any direct and obvious sense. Most of the book's contributors stick closely to the particular national setting they purport to illuminate, and only a small handful of the essays try to draw contrasts or make comparisons with developments elsewhere. Catherine Colebourne's chapter on the treatment of the insane in Victoria is notable, among other things, for being one of the few that attempts to look at local developments in a larger context, drawing upon studies of Ireland, England, and South Africa as well as her Australian sources. And David Wright's own substantive chapter on Ontario asylums (written with James Moran and Sean Gouglas) develops instructive parallels with developments in England and in Europe. For the most part, however, it is left to the reader to disentangle the resemblances and differences, and to try to make sense of them. Porter contributed a characteristically facile and jaunty introduction to the collection, but neglected to

use the opportunity to tackle these issues himself in any serious or sustained way.

Geographically, the range of the contributions is quite wide, spanning Asia, Australia, Latin America, Canada and the United States, Europe and Africa. Some of the chapters summarize research reported at more length elsewhere. Jonathan Sadowsky reprises his work on psychiatry in colonial Nigeria, and Peter McCandless his discussion of developments at the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum. Others traverse fresher territory, but the variation in the intellectual sophistication and quality of these chapters is at least as great as their geographical heterogeneity. Akihito Suzuki contributes a characteristically superb exploration of Japanese materials, which draws substantially on his detailed knowledge of European developments and provides a compelling portrait of the relationships between state, family, and the insane in the period between 1900 and 1945. Jacques Gasser and Geneviève Heller provide a detailed comparative analysis of admissions to two Swiss asylums in a similar period, from 1900 to 1970, giving us a better sense of the types of patients committed to these places, and emphasizing that the Swiss asylums' primary role seems to have been to defuse short term public or familial crises, rather than to serve as instruments of long-term confinement.

Other chapters, however, are far less successful. Andrea Dörries and Thomas Beddies' chapter on a Berlin asylum, though providing some insight into the impact of Weimar, Nazi, and post Second World War political regimes on hospital and patient, is marred throughout by a muddled and confused treatment of evidence (and includes the remarkable claim that electroconvulsive therapy was employed on the patients from the mid-1930s onwards, which could only be true if the hospital doctors invented the technique). Chapters on developments in Argentina and Mexico are insubstantial and poorly written, and Sanjeev Jain's chapter on India is a set of near random observations jumbled together in a barely coherent fashion. He does uncover, however, a "Mr. Porter, who has been suffering from a maniacal complaint"

Book Reviews

(p. 275)—perhaps we have at last discovered the secret of Roy’s superhuman productivity!

There is, then, some useful information in this volume. Overall, though, it lacks much sense of coherence, and the great variability in the quality of the contributions makes it difficult to recommend with any enthusiasm.

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Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker (eds),
Contagion: historical and cultural studies,
Routledge Studies in the Social History of
Medicine, London and New York, Routledge,
2001, pp. xiii, 240, illus., £55.00 (hardback
0-415-24671-7).

Contagion: historical and cultural studies is a thought-provoking edited collection that permeates the boundaries between history, sociology, geography and the health sciences. According to the editors, the volume seeks to provide a “critical elaboration on the history and present” of what one of the contributors, Margrit Shildrick, terms “the dream of hygienic containment”. The elusiveness of control, claim the editors, “sustains the fascination of contagion in the cultural imagination of the west” (pp. 1–2). It is difficult to argue with this, given international concern over, and research resources pouring into, the prevention of (re)emerging infectious disease and bioterrorist threats.

The book is subdivided into two time periods. The first deals with the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, while the second takes up matters of contagion in more recent history. From a host of competing ideas and formulations, I have chosen to identify three key issues to bridge this modern/post-modern divide. One is “foreignness”. The fear of the transmissibility of foreign biological entities can express itself in public health policies that focus on “foreign” peoples. Warwick Anderson’s study of the public health and laboratory practices of American colonialism in the Philippines; Alison Bashford’s connection of smallpox inoculation and vaccination to oriental and colonial history; and the examination of the management of leprosy

and race in inter-war Australia by Bashford and Maria Nugent, address this aspect of foreignness to a greater or lesser extent. Here we have challenging histories that consider public health policies as “civilizing”, racializing, differentiating, spatializing, and as mechanisms for empire- and state-building. Such approaches might be regarded as indicative of the influence of cultural interpretations on the history of health, while Marsha Rosengarten’s chapter on organ transplantation, be that human to human or animal to human, stresses the significance of the immunological “self” defending against “foreign” invasion, in a more contemporary context.

Another theme connected to foreignness is that of dangerousness. The dangers of this volume are Claire Hooker’s elusive typhoid carriers and milk supply in Moorabbin, Victoria, Australia, in the early 1940s; and in the disabled body as discussed by Shildrick, which “may carry no infectious agents, and yet is treated as though it is contaminatory” (p. 158). Closely allied to such notions of dangerousness are those of risk. This is most explicitly dealt with by Lisa Adkins’ essay on how HIV testing is constructive of heterosexual self-identity as “low-risk”, rather than simply as a technology for identifying homosexual as “high-risk”. Adkins’ argument is also interesting for students of public health and risk in that it suggests a complexity of hierarchies, and diverse categorizations, of risk.

A third bridge across the chronology, in addition to dangerousness and foreignness, is how morbid agents are conceptualized as seeds that require a fertile soil—in other words, a contaminated environment or a susceptible human being—in order to take hold and prosper. This botanical metaphor had a multiplicity of applications. As Christopher E Forth observes in his chapter on masculinity, writers in late-nineteenth-century France argued that *moral* contagion most threatened those members of the community whose defence mechanism was compromised by some form of hereditary defect, nervous disorder or previously acquired affliction. Margaret Pelling refers to the nineteenth-century biological uses of the metaphor in a wide-ranging survey on