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**H.C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Germany***

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**H.C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in 16th-Century Germany*, Stanford, Stanford U.P., 1999, xvi + 438 pp., ISBN 0 -8047-3334-1**

This well-written book offers more than just a discussion of one type of deviance called madness. In dealing with all conceivable phenomena somehow connected to mental disturbance, it touches on almost every aspect of socio-cultural history. Thus, we get an in-depth discussion of the St. Vitus dancing mania, of which even contemporaries were not sure whether it served as a cure for disturbed people's ailments or it was a part of their problem. Midelfort's elaborate analysis of the ideas of Paracelsus, a somewhat shadowy figure from the viewpoint of mainstream historiography, is very useful. Further, we learn that the work of Johan Wier (whom Midelfort, too, insists on calling Weyer) not only represented skepticism with regard to witchcraft, but that it served as a crucial contribution to the development of the insanity defense in criminal trials. Wier based himself on the ancient Roman law of contract, arguing that impossible contracts like a pact with the devil had no legal existence. Whoever was so idiotic as to think to have signed one, could not be guilty of any crime. From the views of learned contemporaries, Midelfort shifts to a discussion of traditional folly, court fools in particular. Whether «natural» or artificial, none of them appears to have been considered as a person revealing a deeper truth. The author might also have included the 'foolish societies' (abbeys of misrule, etc.) of urban neighborhoods, as investigated by Natalie Davis, into the discussion here. The last two chapters deal with pilgrimages (the author insisting on their continued importance for Catholics, after a brief decline, during the Counter-Reformation) and hospitalization, albeit that the two hospitals on which the chapter focuses only housed a minority of mad people.

The book's title, therefore, is rather modest, which also applies to its chronological and geographic scope. The discussion ranges in fact from the end of the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth. Moreover, for Midelfort, Germany appears to include the Netherlands, North and South, a view with which this reviewer cannot agree. The very first case discussed in the book involves the painter Hugo van der Goes, who, though born in Zeeland as his name indicates, lived most of his life in the Flemish town of Ghent. Flanders never even belonged to the Holy

Roman Empire. But perhaps the inclusion of Dutch and Flemish examples is meant by way of comparison, as Midelfort also occasionally compares his data to people and events in France or Southern Italy. Indeed, when he started his project twenty-five years ago, he wanted to write a history of madness in early modern Europe. So the scope of his study actually has diminished, but this surely meant a gain in profoundness. The long duration of Midelfort's project betrays itself in the frequency with which he calls the studies he cites «recent»: the oldest example I noted was from 1977 (p. 200).

But then again, a publication from 1977 is relatively recent among the vast amount of citations of books and articles (often in obscure journals) since the late nineteenth century. As well as to material from eight different archives and some two hundred printed sources, Midelfort has consulted secondary works adding up to a bibliography of twenty-five pages. It would be quibbling to mention the few missing titles I can think of. This is surely a work of great erudition. While dealing with a not too traditional subject, Midelfort has produced an admirable piece of classical historical scholarship. To my satisfaction, the listing of titles in the bibliography is also classical: with the year of publication at the end.

The most important theme running through the book is the all-pervasiveness of religion in the life of contemporaries. Although many recognized physical causes of forms of madness, individual cases as well as general theories were always discussed within a religious idiom. In particular, the devil, the Christian personification of evil, was omnipresent. He was just as likely to capture a man or a woman directly as to select an already melancholic person as his target, because he liked black bile. Of course, he tempted people to commit suicide, as he did at other times and places. The unavoidable intrusion of the devil, even in most of the learned discourse on humoral pathology (more prominent among learned views at the end than at the beginning of the period), shaped contemporary attitudes toward madness. Although contemporaries acknowledged that madness entailed diminished responsibility for one's actions, they could not escape infusing their evaluation of the mad with moral and religious judgments. As has been noted by other scholars, a medical view of madness existed in preindustrial Europe, but its immersion in religious and moral thinking made it quite different from modern psychiatry.

A second, more implicit theme concerns Midelfort's argument with Foucault. In whatever shape and wherever we encounter the mad people of the sixteenth century, they were always outsiders of a kind. Hardly any signs of an acceptance of insanity or a dialogue with the mad were visible. As noted above, that even holds true for the court fools, who were essentially kept as a source of amusement. The romantic image of reason leaving a niche for unreason or pilgrims on a wandering quest fails to concur with empirical reality. Conversely, the daily routine in hospitals was less oppressive than in the bleak picture which Foucault painted of life in early modern madhouses. A third general issue is that of gender. Whereas today the rate of hospitalization and seeking counsel for mental problems is higher for women than for men, this was different in the sixteenth century. For example, of both the male and female applicants to Hessian hospitals 21% counted as mentally disordered. Contrary to what is commonly thought, even among the possessed men and women were about equally represented. Neither did contemporary medical writers think of madness as gendered.

In a work like this one always finds points to argue with. Thus, I regret the

absence of a discussion of change over the long term. Midelfort occasionally refers to Elias' notion of the civilizing process, mainly in connection with the custom of keeping court fools. But what about the secularization of madness over the last four centuries? Evidently, modern psychiatry, though not necessarily more adequate in dealing with the mad, is a decidedly more secular system than the religiously loaded approaches which Midelfort describes. Do his data have any bearing on this process of secularization? Similarly, it remains unclear where Midelfort stands with respect to the significance of historical data for our appreciation of madness today. He ignores the work of Thomas Szasz, who offers a radical critique of psychiatry, denying the usefulness of the concept of «mental illness» for understanding the behavior of people who act strangely. Midelfort appears somewhat ambiguous on the question of the relationship between history and psychiatry. Most of the time he stresses that manifestations of and ideas about mental disturbance are primarily cultural constructions; that it is an anachronistic procedure to apply the labels of modern psychiatry to past persons or phenomena. Yet, he does not distance himself fully from modern medical views. This becomes confusing in the table on p. 287, listing the types of madness among the pilgrims reported to have been cured at the shrine of Eberhardsklausen. One category is «visions» and a footnote explains: «The table includes visions only because modern psychiatry has often regarded visions, voices and hallucinations as symptoms of schizophrenia». Were people taken to the shrine to be cured of having visions? Only on pp. 301-302 we learn that the contemporary source just recorded these visions briefly, without considering them as symptoms of mental disorder.

These minor criticisms mainly show that Midelfort's work invites discussion. This is an important book and an excellent piece of scholarship.

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**Philip Rawlings, *Crime and Power: A History of Criminal Justice 1688-1998*, Longman, London and New York, 1999, 212 pp., Longman Criminology Series. ISBN 0 582 3040 6**

Despite the lack of any geographic qualifier in title or subtitle (consistent with publication in the only state that is too haughty to put its name on its stamps or warships!) the focus of this book is England and Wales. There are many good reasons to omit Ireland from overviews like this, but given the amount of relevant material now available for Scotland, future works of this kind ought to be able to include both British jurisdictions.

*Crime and Power* forms part of a series intended for students of criminology and criminal justice, and it serves its purpose as a historical introduction very well. Rawlings' coverage and understanding of the main themes of criminal justice history runs from the eighteenth century to the present day, an impressive scope that is well handled. He does not look at developments in the criminal justice system in isolation but in the context of the political and social context of the time. This background information is necessarily sketchy, but assumes little prior knowledge: