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**Solvi Sogner, (Ed.), *Fact, Fiction and Forensic Evidence : the Potential of Judicial Sources for Historical Research in the Early Modern Period***

Oslo, Tid og Tanke (Skriftserie Fra Historisk institutt Universitet i Oslo),  
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**J.A. Sharpe**



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In October 1996 the Department of History at the university of Oslo organised an Anglo-Norse seminar aimed at bringing together researchers on early modern court records. *Fact, Fiction and Forensic Evidence* is a collection of the papers delivered at that seminar. These papers demonstrate a wide variety of approaches to the subject, which is in any case a very wide one: but there is sufficient overlapping of themes and perspectives to provide intellectual coherence, and the collection is an extremely valuable one, not least because it makes the findings of ac number of Norwegian researchers available to readers of English.

Solvi Sogner provides an introduction which serves to give an overview of the papers and raise some general themes, after which the various papers are grouped into three sections. In the first, «The rhetoric of the court room», there are contributions by two young English scholars, Tim Stretton and Adam Fox, both of whom have both produced distinguished PhD theses based on the imaginative use of judicial sources. Stretton's piece here, «Social historians and the records of litigation», is an excellent discussion of some of the wider issues, while Fox's contribution demonstrates how case studies from legal records can be employed to illustrate the relationship between oral and literate culture. The case study approach is also followed by Kari Telste, who uses an incident of 1746, which can variously be interpreted as a tale of courtship or immorality, as a means of reflecting on the use of court records as narratives. Gunnar W. Knutsen contributes a well researched and perceptive study of witchcraft trials in south – eastern Norway, while Erling Sandmo's thoughtful and stimulating paper raises some interesting problems about the history of the concept of violence.

Part Two of the collection discusses women and the courts, with studies by Amy Louise Erickson on the probate accounts of early modern England, and Hilde Sandvik on depictions of women in court from seventeenth and eighteenth century Norwegian court records. Part Three, on financing trials and administering justice likewise contains two essays. In the first of these Bodil Chr. Erichsen discusses the problems of financing the prosecution of thefts in seventeenth and eighteenth – century Norway, while in the second Joanna Innes provides an overview of the records relating to the English justices of the peace in eighteenth – century England, and of the roles of these important officials.

This is, inevitably, a very varied collection of essays, reflecting as it does a wide range of approaches to the legal records of two countries and ranging from finished pieces by experienced researchers to discussions of initial findings by younger scholars. This means that some papers are more successful than others in opening up wider themes from the materials they study. Understandably, a number of the contributions here are concerned with the necessary initial operations of trying to understand how the court whose records are being studied operated, and how and for what purpose the records which are under scrutiny were constructed. As Sogner points out, law and legal procedures do to some extent exist in a world of their own, and the social historian seeking to use court records must become familiar with that world. When this process of familiarisation has taken place, as the essays brought together here demonstrate, legal materials offer the historian access to an enormous number

of areas of research which otherwise would remain elusive, or whose very existence might be only very imperfectly grasped. Legal records survive in bulk (frightening bulk in the English case), and many court archives have as yet only barely been investigated. But as the authors of the papers collected here remind us, if these records are approached with the appropriate mixture of caution and imagination, exciting new perspectives can be opened up on the past.

J.A. Sharpe  
(University of York, England)  
jas@york.ac.uk

**Martin Rubin, *Thrillers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, xiv + 319 p., 70 b&w illustrations, ISBN-0-521-58183 4 (hb), 0-521-58839-1 (pb).**

This book is the first in a new series from Cambridge University Press entitled *Genres in American Cinema* (general editor: Barry Keith Grant). The thriller has been a much-neglected genre in film studies (less so in literature), so any new work in this field is to be welcomed. Martin Rubin has successfully fulfilled the series' aim of providing «a comprehensive account of its genre... balancing theoretical and historical discussion with close readings of representative films» (p. iii). Yet in certain respects, the subject seems an unusual choice with which to begin this series. Firstly, the thriller is a notoriously difficult genre to define, encompassing as it does crime films, gangster films, police and private-eye films, spy films and horror films. As the author himself points out: «The very breadth and vagueness of the thriller category understandably discourages efforts to define it precisely» (p. 13). And secondly, unlike certain movie genres such as the western or the musical, there is nothing *uniquely* American about the thriller, a genre which can be identified in most national cinemas and which is especially conducive to international cross-fertilisation.

Rubin's solution to the first of these problems is to take the broadest possible understanding of what constitutes a thriller: «The thriller can be conceptualised as a 'metagenre' that gathers several other genres under its umbrella, and as a band in the spectrum that colors each of those particular genres» (p.4). Thus he casts his net widely to include films that might seem tangential to the thriller, including early chase films such as Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and the lesser-known *Capture of «Yegg» Bank Burglars* (1904), the suspense melodramas of D. W. Griffith such as *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) and *The Girl and Her Trust* (1912), and the «comedy of thrills» exhibited in the films of Harold Lloyd, such as *Girl Shy* (1924) and *Speedy* (1928). What these films share in common is a sense of visceral pleasure and edge-of-your-seat suspense which Rubin identifies as a key ingredient of the thriller. Rubin's «metagenre» also extends the boundaries of the thriller to include the horror film (which most film historians regard as a genre in its own right), thus warranting the inclusion of the classic monster films of the 1930s – he identifies *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) as a significant film which links the European Gothic of the Dracula and Frankenstein cycles to the modern urban melodrama of the American newspaperreporter film – and more recent manifestations of American horror in the «splatter» and «stalker» films which have proliferated since the 1970s.