

The phrase “public madness” in the title, perhaps puzzling initially, does not remain so for long. Kromm subjects public-ness to careful dissections in contexts ranging from Plato’s conception of mania as the disease of the body politic to art’s functioning in such public places as the courtyard of the Amsterdam Dolhuis and the associated problems of decency: the statue of naked female *Frenzy* “exceeds the bounds of social decorum even for an image of madness . . . and such impropriety discomposes a public sculpture’s didactic role” (p. 83). Remedies for such affronts to the public include the real sufferer’s removal into the cell and, eventually, to the institution, familiar solutions cast into a new light by decency’s demands, and by Kromm’s explanation of a central historical conception of mania, as opposed to melancholia, as “an absolute rejection of civilizing processes” (p. 25).

Explorations of public spaces and of the gender, goodwill, and visual experiences of viewing publics—that is, everyone from the putatively careless youths glancing at the didactic reliefs over the doors of Amsterdam institutions to the critics writing with “an intriguing combination of oversights and obsessive concerns” (p. 141) about Carle van Loo’s painting, exhibited 1759, of Mlle Clairon as Medea (they concentrated on picking holes in the depiction of *Jason*)—are central to the history of “visual culture”, which is not quite the same as the history of art. The latter is, traditionally, the study of the exceptional; but visual-cultural historians want to work with the hackneyed or typical too. At its best, as here, the approach permits some fascinating cross-connections—a disarray indicative of “impetuous movements” among other unfeminine habits links, for example, Rubens’ depiction of Marie de’Medici (grandmother of Charles II), Frans Hals’ of old *Malle Babbe*, and the anonymous English print (1676) of the virago *Mother Damnable*—as well as the reappraisal of such relatively familiar works as the Hals painting, and Hogarth’s revision, in 1763, of his scene of the Rake in Bedlam. The last includes a mad Britannia that Kromm demonstrates as only one of many such in English graphic satire of the 1760s and 1770s. Alongside a minor painting genre that features

mad, staring (female) eyes, the engraved Britannias are shown, with precision, to have enjoyed a complex relation to radical politics of the day. Though *The art of frenzy*’s final two chapters concern nineteenth-century France, and the volume concludes with J-M Charcot’s “attempt to circumvent the political dimensions and implications of mania’s recent history” (p. 269) at the Salpêtrière, its centre of gravity seems to be the party politics of eighteenth-century England, which involved universal accusations of madness, “with the notable exception of George III himself” (pp. 180–1), standing like the innocent in the middle of a custard-pie fight.

Imagery permits a delicacy of imputation, and interpretation, that texts are hard put to match. Consider, for example, the subtlety with which, as Kromm shows, Jacques Callot’s depiction of a possessed woman—here, as in some other instances, the quality of the reproduction is not up to that of the analysis—shades our reading by making her adopt a cruciform posture; or with which Rubens called attention to the peculiar vulnerability of the powerful but benighted madman, by thrusting the head of the victim forward into our space in what Kromm calls, efficiently, the “ostentatious kind of baroque foreshortening” (p. 73). Particularly given the breadth of Kromm’s range, and the sophistication of her critical skills in the face of all kinds of imagery, I was interested to conclude that it is from the best artists that we can learn the most about historical conceptions of madness and their development: Goya offers us more than Gillray; Rubens is much richer than Robert-Fleury.

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**Steven King,** *A Fylde country practice: medicine and society in Lancashire, c. 1760–1840*, Lancaster, Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, 2001, pp. xiv, 110, £10.95 (paperback 1-86220-117-X).

Just as general history has turned away from traditional descriptive and constitutional studies towards analytical, social and local history, so

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medical history has done the same. Led by historians such as Roy Porter, modern medical history has concerned itself more with the sufferings and afflictions of individuals and their social background than with the heroic achievements of the great doctors of the past.

Steven King is an avowed supporter of the Porter school. His book, *A Fylde country practice*, is a detailed study of illness and the practice of medicine at the grass roots in an area of predominantly rural north-west Lancashire. In particular, he is concerned to examine how the “medical market place” (a term reintroduced by Harold Cook) operated in those years that linked the Georgian and Victorian eras. He has scoured the local archives for Poor Law records, diocesan and parish accounts, personal diaries and letters as well as placing his conclusions in the context of the national scene.

The first part of the book, on ‘Mortality and ill-health’ in Lancashire, is a dramatic account of the appalling amount of illness, often accepted by the suffering as a normal part of life, that afflicted the population of the Fylde. Infections were common but a simple cut on a limb might lead to suppuration and go on to require amputation. The riding of horses was particularly dangerous but there were many other accidents which caused death, “collapsing walls, falls, drowning, accidents with machines, transport accidents, accidents during drunkenness, rabies, and particularly, fire”. Ill-health was a “constant feature of the individual and family lives of Lancastrians”.

How those Lancastrians dealt with their problems is covered in the second major section of the book, ‘Responses to ill-health’. Here the detailed information culled by the author from local records is invaluable. Examples of medical relief by the parish, by charitable organizations, by private individuals, by irregular practitioners such as farriers and butchers, and by quacks of all sorts, jostle for the reader’s attention. There is also a detailed consideration of how the “middling” in society sought to preserve their health. The increasing prosperity of this class led to an increasing use of medical practitioners and played its role in their emergence as influential medical figures.

The last part of the book deals with the ‘Economics of doctoring’. The discovery of the account books of Dr Loxham, which cover the years from the 1750s to the 1780s, is a major contribution to the understanding of how a country practitioner worked during the period under review. Much of his work was midwifery, so that he could well have been classified as a “man-midwife”, but his work extended through the entire range of the ill-health so common among his patients. The accounts also provide unique information on how he made his money, how difficult it was to get paid, how often he had to borrow and how he was also a lender. The period during which he was active may well have appeared to some as the golden age of the practitioner. In rural Lancashire, keeping a well-ordered household, possessing good enough horses for his work and other expenses led to the bankruptcy of medical men in some cases and severe hardship in others.

This book, brief though it would appear to be, is a mine of information. The author is to be congratulated on the extraordinary density of information that he has been able to pack in. It is an example of social history at local level at its best. It should provide a model for similar studies of other parts of the country during that period. All who are concerned with the reality of life for the “common people” at that time should have this book on their shelves.

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**Anne Borsay** (ed.), *Medicine in Wales, c. 1800–2000: public service or public commodity?*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003, pp. x, 253, £40.00 (hardback 0-7083-1824-X).

As Anne Borsay and Dorothy Porter recognize in the introduction to this edited collection, Welsh historiography has been slow to respond to the emergence of the history of medicine. Conversely, most studies of medical history and healthcare devote little space to Wales, except when using it as an example of a depressed area. Although in recent years there has been a