

## Book Reviews

Gilman is alert to the ways in which the “you Jews are so clever. . .” kind of view in fact creates an implicit triangle not a simple polarity: the positioning of a first person plural (us, “wasps”) in contrast with “you” (the clever Jews) are constituted against the still more inalienably inferior (all those other “black races”—“other” in that, as we are shown, Jews are themselves often “blacks” in the history of anti-Semitism). “The Jews” have sometimes been cast as a monolithic group, but just as often as fractured into distinct medico-moral sets (the “pathological”, “dirty” and “unassimilable” new arrivals contrasted, for instance, with the “good”, “healthy” and “respectable” long-time settlers). Whether or not a dose of Gilman would have helped my acquaintance is not clear; racisms after all have functions which precede and endure beyond any rational demonstration of their falsity or perniciousness. But the present inquiry *is* apt and salutary even if its wide-ranging frame of reference occasionally glides too quickly across too much. There is a rather rushed tone about this work, evident in the style, proof-reading and in some strange or at least ambiguous attributions—when we are told that Tarzan was a “British model” is this in spite of or (less likely) in ignorance of its American provenance?

This is in many ways (as we expect from Gilman) a virtuoso phenomenology of stereotypes; if it is bold in conception, it is on occasion glib in its execution (the discussions of Freud and psychoanalysis are less compelling and satisfactory to my mind than many of the others). But the textual allusiveness is often vivid and suggestive, as in the author’s particular emphasis on the (hitherto too little considered) cultural resonances of circumcision, or in the linkage between anti-vivisectionist campaigns in the late nineteenth century (protesting against Kosher meat-treatment practices), social tensions within East End society and the telling fantasies, representations and speculations on the nature of Jack the Ripper: he appeared in pictures at the time as something between Fagin and Mr Hyde (Stevenson’s novella was playing at the theatre in 1888). It is the excessively magisterial singularity of phrase (“the fantasy of the nineteenth century”) and the fiat (“only”) that bothers me in formulations such as the following: “But in the fantasy of the nineteenth century the physician could not remove the prostitute from the street. Only the Whore could kill the whore. Only the whore and Jack . . .”

*The Jew’s body* suggests the complex interrelation of “Aryanism”, anti-Semitism and the affirmation of Jewishness. We are shown the (sometimes grotesque, sometimes poignant) implication of Jews in the discourses of their own oppression: Austrian Jewish commentators for instance who challenged the frequent turn of the century jibe that Jews were innate military cowards by insisting, armed of course with plenty of statistics, that on the contrary they were really the best of all Habsburg warriors; instead (as in my opening anecdote) the necessary analysis and challenge (to which this book contributes) concern the terms of the question, not simply the odiousness of this or that specific answer.

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RACHEL G. FUCHS, *Poor and pregnant in Paris: strategies for survival in the nineteenth century*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1992, pp. xvi, 325, illus., \$45.00 (hardback, 0–1835–1779–6), \$18.00 (paperback, 0–1835–1780).

Readers familiar with Victor Hugo’s *Les misérables* need no introduction to the plight of the poor and pregnant in nineteenth-century Paris. Like the fictional Fantine, poor mothers faced a harsh struggle for survival in a society which seldom demonstrated any real sympathy for their problems. Single mothers especially, on whom Rachel Fuchs’s interesting study concentrates, were for much of the century seen as either innately depraved or morally weak; the softening of public attitudes in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was due less to concerns about the welfare of poor mothers in their own right than to anxieties about a declining population and women’s role as producers of babies.

What social commentators and government officials thought about poverty and illegitimacy was of no small consequence to the lives of the poor: it shaped public policy, hence it influenced women’s strategies for survival. During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, religiously inspired charities dominated the Parisian scene and the limited welfare provisions that such

## Book Reviews

organizations made available were aimed at rehabilitating the poor, particularly by helping cohabiting couples to legalize their union. From 1870 onwards, fears about depopulation prompted the State to assume increasing responsibility for public assistance programmes designed to prevent infanticide and child abandonment. As questions of hygiene replaced questions of morality, protecting the health of poor mothers became more important than reforming their morals, leading to the expansion and modernization of La Maternité, Paris's most important childbirth institution, the provision of financial support for new mothers, and the establishment of well-baby clinics and of day care facilities for children.

Fuchs is anxious to restore poor mothers, a group notoriously "hidden from history", to the centre of the stage. Despite the paucity of the evidence, she manages to get some insight into the difficulties that confronted the poor in an urban setting, highlighting the discrepancy between public discourses about the poor and pregnant on the one hand, and women's lived experience of maternity on the other. Thus while nineteenth-century doctors claimed that poor women had abortions out of fear of dishonour and to protect their reputations, women tried for abortion revealed that it was poverty, not shame, that forced them to take this desperate measure. Child abandonment, which was widely condemned as a heartless and inhumane action, was a difficult and painful decision for many women, made in the belief that it offered the best chance of survival for the infant rather than out of a desire to shirk maternal responsibility.

Although the general themes of Fuchs' study will be familiar to historians of the nineteenth century, its detailed description of charitable initiatives and welfare provisions for poor mothers provides a wealth of material that is especially valuable for comparative purposes. Historians working on Britain will be interested to learn how a different country addressed similar problems, particularly in relation to the establishment of the workhouse system in Britain.

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MILTON LEWIS, *A rum state: alcohol and state policy in Australia, 1788–1988*, Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992, pp. vi, 231, Austral. \$24.95, (9–780644–220248).

There are many books which discuss alcohol control policies, but few which do so in the light of an historical perspective. One of the advantages of Milton Lewis's survey of the development of alcohol policies in Australia is its broad chronological sweep. The book covers two centuries from the late eighteenth century to almost the present day. The focus is a dual one, dealing with both the control and the treatment aspects of policy.

Early settler society in Australia had a hard drinking reputation, although, as Lewis shows, levels of consumption were declining from mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s. Australia experienced a strong temperance movement during the nineteenth century; and, as in Britain, the movement changed its focus from moderation to total abstinence. There were demands for local option and the Maine law. Greater state control during the First World War and the advent of early closing undercut temperance support. In the inter-war years, and in particular post World War II, licensing laws were gradually liberalized (although those in Queensland remained distinctly stiffer).

As Lewis notes, this liberalization and the move away from state responsibility for the consumption of alcohol through control policy took place at the same time as the focus of alcohol policy shifted towards treatment. The broader approach gave way to one focused on the individual. Disease views of alcoholism had their impact in Australia in the late nineteenth century as they had in the U.S. and in Britain. As in Britain, inebriates legislation failed to deal with drunkenness in any significant manner. But it testified to a period of optimism about the possibilities of treatment, an optimism, which, as the author notes, was not borne out by the results.

Optimism did not revive until after World War II. Drugs such as antabuse then seemed to offer a physical "cure" for alcoholism. The advent of Alcoholics Anonymous (Australia was its first established location outside the U.S.) offered a form of neo-temperance to keep drunkards "on the wagon". Disease was rediscovered and state organizations such as the N.S.W. Foundation for Research and Treatment of Alcoholism, founded in the 1950s, pressed for state action. The role of the newly established WHO, as in other national locations, was important in putting alcohol