

In one of the most interesting parts of the book Spierenburg addresses the apparent paradox: if the prince imposed the same sorts of penalties on offenders that private justice had, why were executioners so unpopular? From his evidence there is no doubt that they were unpopular. Executioners were frequently beaten, stoned, shunned, and generally treated as “infamous” or unclean. Spierenburg rejects earlier explanations that rely on supposed magical-sacrificial aspects of the executioner’s work or on the general nastiness of his job. Two other factors were much more important. First, while the use of physical force was acceptable and even admirable, its use by executioners for pay and against people wholly unconnected to them was viewed as shameful. The mercenary likewise was viewed with suspicion while the knight was treated with respect. Perhaps more importantly, the executioner personified the prince’s usurpation of private vengeance, which the people resented. As peasants attacked their lord’s stewards, and rebels denounced not their king, but his evil advisors, so the people attacked the hangman for the prince’s unpopular expropriation of their former right.

Executions, meaning the carrying out of all public punishments, not just capital punishments, were performed as a drama. In the Netherlands, from where Spierenburg gathered most of his information, they were called “awesome ceremonies”. The robes, pipes and drums, prayers, and confessions were all designed to draw attention to the “exemplary” punishments, which demonstrated the prince’s monopoly of violence. Because early modern states suffered from a low degree of public security, the prince’s justice had to be highly visible.

Public executions began to come under increasing attack from the middle of the eighteenth century and for the most part disappeared in the nineteenth. Traditional historiography credits the humanitarian impulses of a few enlightened thinkers with destroying this aspect of the *ancien régime*, but Spierenburg disagrees. Nor does he accept the arguments of Foucault and others that reformers of this period were utilitarian and concerned only with control of criminals and the lower classes. The “privitization” of punishments came about because of a widespread and “fundamental change in sensibilities” of many Europeans, particularly among the upper classes. (200)

The development of this Enlightenment sensibility is the least well explained part of this book. According to Spierenburg, the first part of this transformation included an aversion to the sight of violence. It was a result of the “relative pacification” achieved by early modern states and the consequent appearance of “domesticated elites”. Torture and the exposure of corpses were ended as a result of their repugnance to these sensitive elites. Public executions fell victim soon thereafter to the development of the nation state, which better integrated disparate geographic areas and social groups and was much more stable than the early modern state. With the establishment of nation states, whose laws reached all their people, public executions, which were already distasteful, were no longer necessary. These more pervasive and stable bureaucratic governments did not need regular public displays of their strength to remind the people they held a monopoly of violence.

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GEORGES VIGARELLO — *Le propre et le sale. L'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen-Âge*. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1985. 285 p.

Comment apprend-on la propreté? Voilà un souci majeur que partagent parents, maîtres, animateurs. Mais s'il est inconvenant d'être sale, la propreté a-t-elle toujours résidé dans le lavage du corps? Telle est la question que se pose, en historien et en pédagogue, Georges Vigarello, professeur à l'Université de Paris VIII.

Une propreté qui n'est pas la nôtre préexiste aux travaux de Pasteur. Mais, entre le besoin de se débarrasser de la crasse qui démange, la recherche d'une netteté qui se voit, le désir de se sentir bien dans sa peau, se noue une histoire que l'étonnante documentation de ce livre exhume et explique.

Les exemples fourmillent de ces vagabonds qui cherchent à se débarrasser de la vermine qui les habite et les harcèle en trempant leur chemise dans la rivière, sans songer un seul instant à s'y plonger eux-mêmes. C'est que le bain ne lave pas, alors que la chemise, en revanche, va absorber par imprégnation cette faune grouillante.

Le Grand Siècle nous émerveille de spectacles aquatiques dont, à Versailles, bassins et fontaines marquent l'acmé du raffinement. La cour de Louis XIV baigne dans le luxe; mais il s'agit des plaisirs de l'œil, pas question de vulgaires ablutions.

L'idée que l'eau décrasse est récente; ou plutôt, on ne peut en saisir l'évidence qu'à la lumière des imaginaires que son histoire dévoile: histoire des sciences et des techniques, où la maîtrise des canalisations de la cité pose des problèmes passionnants; histoire des mentalités où les artifices didactiques peinent pour transformer les comportements.

Restent à connaître les parties du corps à préserver, pas seulement de la saleté, mais aussi du microbe. Les yeux? La bouche? Les mains? Le visage? Voilà une axiomatique de l'anatomie où le sain et le malsain sont en prise avec la morale et les directives de la pudeur. Voilà aussi une aventure où l'intériorisation de ces exigences, liées à l'intimité, embarrassent parfois les éducateurs eux-mêmes.

Le livre ne manquera pas de surprendre. On imagine la propreté comme une valeur de culture; mais une fois rassemblés les alliés de la crasse, elle apparaît bien comme l'occasion de se faire rencontrer le politique et l'éducatif, les imaginaires et les forces sociales qui le portent.

Le raffinement d'exemples, où la poudre et les parfums font et défont les distinctions, fera réfléchir sur la signification inchoative des sensibilités à l'intimité corporelle, que développe si remarquablement G. Vigarello.

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ROBERT WELDON WHALEN — *Bitter Wounds. German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984. 245 pp.

Bitter Wounds depicts the experiences of German disabled veterans and war widows and orphans, 1914-1939, concentrating on war's psychological effects and on the victims' struggle to obtain adequate pensions.

Whalen provides a compelling picture of the war's physical and psychological impact. Soldiers experienced years of horror, with one-third of the army wounded each year. Being wounded meant not only terror and pain, but a complete loss of control to often insensitive medical personnel. For over 800,000 Germans, it meant permanent disability. For wives and children, a husband's or father's departure for the front brought prolonged anxiety, while his death meant devastating personal loss and severe economic difficulties.

Germany's political and social divisions fragmented the war victims' efforts to organize. Conservative attempts to co-opt the victims convinced Erich Kuttner, a disabled veteran and SPD member, to found in 1917 a grass-roots victims group to lobby for better treatment. Unlike France