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## BOOK REVIEW

### **A page of unpublished history; A review of:**

**Jean-Francois Bert and Elisabetta Basso (eds.), *Foucault à Münsterlingen; À l'origine de l'Histoire de la folie, Avec des photographies de Jacqueline Verdeaux* (Paris: Éditions de l'école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2015), 1-288, € 24.00, ISBN: 978-2-7132-2508-6, ISSN 0766-1827.**

In a short text published in the French journal *Le Gaulois* on October 27, 1880, under the title "A page of unpublished history," the French novelist Guy de Maupassant relates a supposedly authentic but hitherto uncharted piece of history that proved decisive in the life of the young Napoléon Bonaparte, who was later to become "le grand Napoléon." When the corporal was taken hostage by royalists on Corsica, their attempt to execute him was interrupted as the royalist general's wife interfered; and thus Napoleon's life was able to go on and he was able to pursue his course. In this manner, "a woman's exasperated gesture" and its effect on what seemed a minor incident in its time managed to decide the fate of Europe and "change the entire modern history." A number of important victories on the battlefield would not have taken place and millions of people would not have died; even as the map of Europe and the forms of government would have been different. Three days before his death, Napoleon remembered and payed homage to this long bygone, yet decisive, event as he drew up an addition to his will that made the woman the beneficiary of an important amount of money.

Jean-Francois Bert and Elisabette Basso (eds.): *Foucault à Münsterlingen. À l'origine de l'Histoire de la folie* may be read as an attempt to excavate and document a similarly decisive but hitherto overlooked event in the life of the young Foucault, who was later to become a renowned scholar, philosopher, and historian. On March 2, 1954, Foucault visits the Münsterlingen asylum in Switzerland to attend the yearly carnival procession (Fastnachts-Umzug) organized there. At first inspection, this may seem like just a day like any other in the life of the still relatively young Foucault, aged 27. Nonetheless, the accompanying announcement to the book and the cover blurb of the book claim that Foucault "will be transformed by this day," while the subtitle of the book suggests that the volume gives access to the origins of Foucault's first major work, his doctoral dissertation *The History of Madness*, published and defended somewhat later (in 1961).

Accordingly, the volume takes great pains to secure access to the decisive moment, not only by making the occurrences in the Münsterlingen asylum graphic, but also by rendering the context of Foucault's experience intelligible to the reader.

The work makes compulsory reading, already after a cursory glance, due to the important range of interesting historical documentation. The sheer breadth of historical illustrations and documents contained in the volume is impressive; and the contributors must have put in a great deal of work to procure this material from various private and public sources.

When he paid visit to the asylum in Münsterlingen, Foucault was accompanied by his friends Jacqueline and Georges Verdeaux, who had permitted him to work as a psychologist at the psychiatric hospital Sainte-Anne in Paris; and the volume contains a number of photos of the carnival procession and concomitant circumstances taken by Jacqueline Verdeaux. In addition to other photos of the asylum, the book presents photographs of Foucault together with various people the young philosopher and psychologist entered into contact with and met at the time, among others: the couple Verdeaux, psychiatrist Roland Kuhn, who was in charge of the Münsterlingen asylum, and psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, whose work Foucault translated and studied intensely. On top of this, the volume exhibits Foucault's entrance in the visitor's book at Münsterlingen on the 2th of March, together with reproductions of letters exchanged between Roland Kuhn and Foucault, Binswanger and Foucault, and Jean-Paul Aron and Foucault. Moreover, examples of Foucault's analysis of Rorschach tests are provided, along with Foucault's preparatory notes on various psychiatric subjects. Equally, excerpts from Foucault's manuscript *Maladie mentale et personnalité* and *Le rêve et l'existence* are reproduced and introduced.

Concomitantly, however, the volume contains a number of interesting and very erudite essays. Written by specialists in Foucault, philosophers, anthropologists, and medievalists, these essays, of which only some can be mentioned here, provide the context for these historical documents and for Foucault's visit to Münsterlingen with scholarly rigour in order to make it possible to measure the impact of the visit on the trajectory of Foucault's thought. While Francois Bert's initial essay "Retour à Münsterlingen" provides a very diversified survey of the background and provides a complex context for the understanding of Foucault's visit, Margaly Tornay's "La gentille dame Largactil, la méchante dame Geigy" gives us a glimpse of the site under development visited by Foucault. While Philippe Sabot's "Entre psychologie et philosophie" discusses Foucault's early examination and contention with psychology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and anthropology; Elisabetta Basso's "*Le rêve et l'existence, histoire d'une traduction*" examines Foucault's work on and discussion with Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse*. Yann Dahhaoui's "La fête des fous de Michel Foucault" and René Wetzel's "'Unissons-nous, soyons fous!' Fête des fous, carnival et Mad Pride: continuités, ruptures et perspectives" discuss the role and transformations of the phenomena 'Fastnacht' and 'carnaval' within a broader context.

Even though they wisely avoid falling prey to the temptation to present *the* fountainhead or mainspring of Foucault's work, the contributions to this volume jointly indicate how various sources to Foucault's *History of Madness* may come together to be reflected and refracted in

Foucault's experience at Münsterlingen. Concomitantly, the publication of the volume testifies to the fact that this century may be experienced as Foucauldian, to such an extent that a page of unpublished history is doomed to become the subject of not only a short story, but of an entire volume.

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