Generally speaking, this book presents the Fabrist reform of the university as simultaneously a point of convergence, a bridge, and a factor in the transformation of many aspects of early modern culture. It connects different historical periods (the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), different cultural traditions (French, Italian, and German), different instances of power (the Court, the Church, and the University), different social groups (scholars and craftsmen), different visions of pedagogy (scholastic and humanistic), different roles within the university (masters and students), different modes and styles of transmission of knowledge (manuscript/print, oral/written, and contemplative/operative), and different disciplines (both within the *quadrivium* and between mathematics and non-mathematical disciplines). This book therefore stands as a crucial case study to reassess and transcend these various dichotomies in the historiography of early modern European scientific culture and education.

Besides the rich and original outlook this book provides on the Fabrists' mathematical teaching and pedagogical reform, it is also invaluable for the rare opportunity it offers the reader to consider the form and content of 500-year-old textbooks from the perspective of their intended audience (university students) and within the context of direct interaction with their authors, in a classroom environment. As Oosterhoff makes clear throughout the book, the very fact that this precious material can be accessed is possible because of the way Lefèvre and his circle conceived, organised, and transmitted their mathematical teaching to their students: that is, as an education that was more affordable to acquire, adapted to the pedagogical needs of students (especially to manage a large sum of learning), and which was presented as the key to the arts curriculum. Thus, this work not only fills a gap in the historiography of early modern pedagogy in relation to the appearance of printing in Europe, but shows also how "mathematics became the engine for transforming knowledge" (p. 1) within an unexpected place and time—the University of Paris at the end of the 15th century.

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Un enfant à l'asile. Vie de Paul Taesch (1874–1914)

Anatole Le Bras

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During its 19th-century heyday, how was the asylum system experienced by the ordinary inmates who constituted the majority of its population? And what light might the details of one of those individual asylum lives shed, in its singularity, on the broader historical conditions informing French psychiatric medicine or administrative practices around internments? Paul Taesch, the protagonist of *Un Enfant à l'asile*, is one such "ordinary" inmate, who is

rendered exceptional for having penned an autobiography that remained in his medical file at the Saint-Athanase Asylum in Quimper (Brittany, France) for historian Anatole Le Bras to discover. Taesch's life overlaps with the heyday of the asylum as a disciplinary system in France, a historical context that has been extensively theorised and scrutinised in the historiography, most famously by Foucault. In transmitting Taesch's "singular and moving story" ("récit singulier et émouvant," p. 17), Le Bras aligns his work with the movement to write such histories "from below," a current which continues to flourish in Francophone history of science, and also with efforts, particularly emerging from the medical humanities, to valorise patients' writings and points of view. For at its centre is Taesch's autobiography, which appears to Le Bras as something of a micro-historical "revelation": "Medical diagnoses are submitted to the test of the patient's experiences; the complexity of an individual trajectory appears behind apparently routine administrative measures" (p. 31).[1] *Un Enfant à l'asile* accordingly provides historians with a richly developed individual story against which to elucidate diverse aspects of 19th-century French psychiatry, while reciprocally placing Taesch's singular life within its historical context.

Le Bras proposes primarily to serve as a "*passeur*" (intermediary, p. 17) for Taesch's story, and to this end, the first section of *Un Enfant à l'asile* comprises a dossier of archival sources documenting Taesch's path through various asylums. Most prominent is the autobiography itself: some 20 pages of *mémoires* addressed by Taesch in March 1896 to the medical director of the Saint-Athanase Asylum as part of a plea for an early release. This first-person narrative recounts Taesch's life spent in asylums of one kind or another since his early childhood, and reconstructs the trajectory of his mental condition—one essentially based on simulation of epileptic attacks, as Taesch tells it. To extend Taesch's account of himself, Le Bras assiduously searched asylum, police, orphanage, and public records for further traces of this "child of the asylum's" passage. For instance, he combed Désiré-Magloire Bourneville's annual reports of his pioneering child-psychiatry service at Bicêtre Hospital to find mention of Taesch, since the patient's individual record is no longer extant. The dossier thus follows Taesch from his birth certificate (1874), through his childhood in several asylums, notably Bicêtre, to Quimper and Taesch's six incarcerations in the asylum at Ville-Evrard (outside Paris), and finally to his death in 1914. The documents are presented chronologically and supplemented by occasional explanatory footnotes and contemporaneous photos, while useful appendices contain illustrative maps and a full chronology of Taesch's life. Beyond administrative and medical documents, Taesch's dossier from the Quimper asylum contains a fascinating correspondence from the first half of 1897 between Taesch's siblings, the asylum director, and Taesch himself (pp. 100–112). The director's intention to release Taesch is frustrated by his brother Henri's panicked insistence that to do so would make Taesch a "vagabond" (p. 101), providing valuable insight into the dynamics of interactions between asylum, family, and *aliéné* (mental patient). The tensions and concerns present in a family's reaction to its interned sibling unfold as the director responds not to Henri but to Taesch's sister, Louise, and then as Louise and another sister attempt to explain and to reassure Taesch—who is tempted, in turn, to renounce them definitively, in a letter of enraged abandonment that was suppressed by the asylum censors.

Le Bras's own historiographical contribution follows in the second part of the book. In three chapters, he takes the course of Taesch's life as a guide through which to explore overlapping psychiatric categories, to reconstruct the everyday experience of asylum internment, and to consider the difficulties attending the transition between asylum and life in society. By presenting Taesch's dossier first, before any detail of contextualisation or analysis, Le Bras allows readers to form their own questions and conclusions from the historical material. The ordering also risks undervaluing some of the documents, however, particularly more opaque administrative texts, while comparison between the dossier and the historiographical chapters is complicated by inconsistent (usually absent) cross-referencing. Indeed, Le Bras engages in relatively little analysis of Taesch's autobiography (or of other documents in the dossier), nor in developing a particular interpretation of this singular life; his endeavour is, rather, one of historical

[1]"Les diagnostics médicaux sont mis à l'épreuve du ressenti du patient; la complexité d'une trajectoire personnelle transparaît derrière l'apparente banalité des actes administratifs" (p. 31).

contextualisation. It oscillates between mobilising the singularity of Taesch's case to thicken description of historical conditions and dynamics already well appreciated by historians, and resituating various elements and episodes from the dossier in their particular institutional, medical, or social contexts.

Thus the first chapter on Taesch as a psychiatric subject takes the fact of his childhood internment in Bicêtre as the occasion to outline Bourneville's attempts to reform child psychiatry in late 19th-century France by expanding categories of childhood madness beyond idiocy. The list of diagnoses appearing in Taesch's dossier similarly leads Le Bras to consider the overlapping psychiatric nosology of simulation, epilepsy, hysteria, and degeneration. The interpretative frame is broadly Foucauldian, and while Le Bras relates Taesch's case to much of the relevant historiography, he draws upon this scholarship predominantly for evidentiary features, rather than engaging in deeper analysis or wider debates. Taesch's claims to have simulated his epilepsy could be confronted more productively with Pierre-Henri Castel's theorisations of hysterical simulation, to take one example.[2]

It is the second chapter that demonstrates more convincingly the interest of a reciprocal movement between text and context, as Le Bras enlists a range of historical accounts to add further voices (including his own) to this polyphonic biography. He recreates in evocative terms the administrative journey of a child entering the asylum system and the typical daily life in a child psychiatry service. This double (but largely uncritical) reading continues with episodes from Taesch's autobiography juxtaposed with contemporaneous documents and critical scholarship, so as to detail areas of slippage in medical control of interned patients, and reciprocally, to elicit the likely effect of indiscipline and uncontrolled sexuality at Bicêtre on Taesch's later asylum career as a recidivist.

A range of historical factors can be considered to have informed Taesch's oscillatory movement between leaving and seeking to return to the asylum: the economic dynamics of an apprenticeship in Paris, the isolation of the asylum, the growth of assistance networks for released *aliénés*, and the rules and pressures constraining both asylum doctors and patients. Le Bras examines these in turn in the final chapter, as well as presenting his detailed genealogical research into Taesch's family, and reconstructing a vivid picture of death from tuberculosis—of the kind suffered by Taesch. Throughout, Le Bras develops an implicit argument for construing the orphaned Taesch as eternally a child, a minor. More remarkable, however, is the light shed by Taesch's dossier on the role of charitable women in assisting formerly interned patients, a point Le Bras signals briefly (see pp. 247–248).

Indeed, there remains great potential for further critical analysis of the Taesch dossier: as an autobiographical narrative, for its contrast to other writings of the mad, for familial attitudes to internment, to name a few. Le Bras's readable discussions provide a useful contextual basis from which to explore this singular patient's life. But ultimately, it is in the painstaking compilation of a rich and varied set of sources, their extensive coverage one asylum life, that the greatest strength of *Un Enfant à l'asile* lies.

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[2]Castel (1998).