

B O O K R E V I E W S

Pianeta diversità. Per una memoria del manicomio di Siena, Francesca Vannozzi, Franco Angeli, Milano 2018, ISBN 978-88-917-8031-7, pp. 248

On 6th December 1818 it was opened – inside the old monastery of San Niccolò – the Psychiatric Hospital of Siena. It has hosted for about 200 years histories of dementia and exclusion which have been retraced by Francesca Vannozzi in her new book *Pianeta diversità. Per una memoria del manicomio di Siena*.

She has followed a purely scientific approach based on the analysis of the archive documentation through which Francesca Vannozzi has investigated the history of mental disease and psychiatric hospitals. She has highlighted how the history of these hospitals is far more complicated because they have always housed not only mad people but a wide varied universe of people. People refused and marginalised by the society because of their being different, troublesome or just behaving “differently” from the “normal” behaviours outlined by the same society.

The book is a collection of essays published over the course of thirty years by the same author and regarding the history of mental disease and the treating of psychiatric patients, along with unpublished works on this topic. The occasion was the recurrence of the 200 years from the opening of the Psychiatric Hospital in Siena.

She has started by an historical definition of psychiatric treatment in Eighteenth Century Tuscany, so that Francesca Vannozzi’s analysis has been specifically lingered on the Siense reality. Some of her works have been focused on the figure of Carlo Livi, the San Niccolò Psychiatric Hospital Director from 1858 to 1873

and on his modern vision of madness. Indeed, thanks to Livi, in the Siense Psychiatric Hospital madness started to be considered as a disease and the patients as people to be treated. By means of the «cura morale» (moral treatment’), he intended to give back to those women and men who had been shut up in the Psychiatric Hospital that dignity of human being denied by the society. He considered Occupational Therapy as a ‘useful means’ to defeat mental alienation.

The book is characterised by several essays which testify a path towards a science of the mind, hailing from the segregation to achieve the possibility of a psychiatric treatment, the mental hygiene. Moreover, the book studies in depth the detachment of the Academic Psychiatric Department from the Psychiatric Hospital and the progressive losing of its function.

Francesca Vannozzi’s work aims at offering an «homogeneous and full reconstruction of the history of the important Siense Psychiatric Hospital» and at giving «the readers, the students, the scholars all the tools to well understand such a situation, what it has represented, how it was managed, who has ‘lived’ and worked in it and how it has changed with the passing of time». She also explains how it headed towards its closure, established by the Law 180/1978 which really occurred only on 30th September 1999. She does so by considering some enhancement perspectives of this place which, by being considered an ‘empty urban place’, could become a symbolic place of knowledge and inclusion.

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