



Iain Hutchison. *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland.* Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. Illustrations. ix + 386 pp. \$129.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7734-5271-8.

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Experience and Identity: Recovering the Lives of Disabled People in Nineteenth-Century Scotland

As his title indicates, Iain Hutchison has set himself an ambitious goal with respect to time, space, and theme. His approach is to define his subject in a holistic sense to incorporate any disabling condition experienced over the life course, whether permanent or temporary (p. 8). In practice, the principal focus is mental health, blindness, deafness, and physical impairment arising from accidents, although he also deals with chronic illnesses, such as tuberculosis and musculoskeletal diseases. The geographical ambit is equally capacious, for his intent is not simply to discover the disabled experience in Scotland's urban centers, but also to bring into view the situation in thinly populated rural areas. His empirical material is therefore as likely to come from parochial records of Shetland or estate papers from the Isle Arran as it is from Glasgow's Gartnavel or the Edinburgh Blind Asylum. The timeframe too is daunting, for this was a century of rapid economic development which powered deep social change in Scotland, above all the impact of industrialization, with accelerating urbanization and the migration of populations away from the land to new lives in the cities or overseas.

Indeed it is these dynamic forces acting on family, labor, and community that structure Hutchison's narrative. Disabled people, he argues, enjoyed greater acceptance and integration in agrarian Scotland, where participation in work and the bonds of neighborhood knitted them into village and crofting life. By contrast, the

anomie and isolation of the city meant a step change in their experience of otherness and increasing marginalization with respect to work and social ties. The result was that disabled lives became more regulated and institutionalized, with the superficially sympathetic interventions of philanthropists, doctors, and teachers serving to disempower individuals and fuel intolerance. This in turn led to diverse responses ranging from compliance to reaction and self-assertion. In unfolding this argument, Hutchison aims to give voice to his subjects, rather than to view them through the eyes of custodians or caregivers. His mission is to recover the testimony of disabled people, whether directly or indirectly, in literary sources, letters, and poor law or judicial records. The real triumph of this work is the collection of such compelling qualitative data, which conveys not simply injustice, prejudice, and grief, but also humor, determination, and resilience.

The book begins with a survey of external perceptions of disability, principally from those who classified and quantified disabled people as a precursor to intervention, and in so doing normalized conceptions of "the other." From a variety of texts, a picture emerges of educated observers peddling attitudes that were patronizing and enforced notions of difference. Central to this process were efforts to categorize individuals for census counts or institutional reports, thereby rendering them a "problem." Working-class observers seem to have been less judgmental due to the omnipresence of disability in their mi-

lieu, though proletarian intolerance and cruelty were also in evidence. The theme of socially divergent attitudes recurs in discussion of literary sources, where middle-class authors purveyed a patronizing nostalgia for the now disappearing *âvillage idiotâ* while well-meaning professionals objectified disability and displayed little empathy. Testimony from people with impairments themselves might have rectified this, but their opportunities to publish were negligible.

In light of this absence, the next sections of the book reconstruct experience through the traces that remain in administrative records, such as letters to parochial boards, poor law applications, and court testimony. These sources again point to the willingness of the poor to sustain their disabled neighbors out of fellow-feeling for the fragility and impermanence of good health; this was less true for the better-off, for whom acceptance depended on *âsubmission to middle-class ideals of respectability and religious observanceâ* (p. 168). Institutions similarly demanded submissiveness, for behind their rhetoric of care and refuge the custodial function loomed large, particularly before the mid-century when physical restraint was more common in the asylums. Though Erving Goffman is not cited, his reading of the asylums *âdehumanizing conformity provides the leitmotif of this part of the book. The final theme is the possibility of self-realization through relationships and *âromanceâ* (p. 308). On this the evidence is mixed, with institutions predictably inimical to affairs between residents, and families sometimes evincing support and sometimes pragmatic coolness. It is in this section particularly that real individuals, with all their desires and striving, emerge, and here too that the messiness and diversity of human experience militates against any pat conclusion.*

Despite detailed discussion of the manner in which disabled people were enumerated, Hutchison shuns the presentation of quantitative data. Only occasionally does this appear and then almost as an afterthought, with, for example, fleeting reference to the scale of asylum populations, or numbers of *âlunatic paupersâ* slipped into a footnote (pp. 15, 73). This is entirely consistent with his critique of the power of statistics to demean and reduce. Yet it also deprives the reader of any sense of scale

and trends, and makes this protean subject almost too diffuse. Used carefully, statistics too can give voice to the voiceless, and perhaps we could have learned something from the efforts of census takers or self-promoting asylum managers without necessarily colluding in their projects. Similarly hospital records might have lent epidemiological substance to assertions about disablement's ubiquity in working-class communities. Legal milestones and foundations of institutions or associations are also downplayed, emerging only unsystematically and cursorily (eg., p. 174).

The absence of such framing material therefore means that some planks of the argument rely on fairly limited anecdotal evidence. For example, the section on community rejection makes much of *âmiddle-class prejudiceâ* (p. 168), yet this is founded on just a few cases: detail of one asylum committal and the certification of two sisters; the observation that the disabled, along with everyone else, went unspared in the Duke of Sutherland's land clearances; and one example of individual testimony of the stigma of mental illness that implicated both professionals and local people. Similarly, the conclusions reached about institutions is that *âsocial and economic control regularly took precedence over patient care and interest in individualsâ with inmates viewed by *âkeepers and attendants ... as less than fellow human beingsâ* (p. 238). However with so little systematic data advanced on either care regimes or interpersonal relationships, as against examples of control, it is hard to be certain whether such judgments are valid.*

These reservations prompt a final thought. The thrust of the book's argument is familiar from studies that track the social construction of disability under capitalism: a kinder *Gemeinschaft* giving way to a harder *Gesellschaft*, and the coming of a class society auguring depersonalization and marginalization. Yet the accretion of qualitative fragments gathered here, as Hutchison acknowledges, *âdo not speak in unisonâ* (p. 333). Instead we are left with abiding variety, which strains against the bounds of narrative we would impose to make sense. In the end then it is the multifaceted nature of experience and the irreducibility of the individual that this book so powerfully affirms.

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