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Linda V. Carlisle. *Elizabeth Packard: A Noble Fight.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xii + 259 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03572-2.

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Linda V. Carlisle has written a complex and comprehensive portrait of Elizabeth Packard (1816-97). It is a fascinating story, detailed with the intricacies of her historical context. In June 1850, Packard was placed, against her will, in the Jacksonville, Illinois, insane asylum by her disgruntled husband. She eventually won her release and devoted her life to reforming the rights of those deemed insane and to advocating for women's rights.

Tracing the evolution of women's biography, Carolyn Gold Heilbrun notes that, whereas authors previously wrote of women transforming "rage into spiritual acceptance," today's authors acknowledge their pain; their rage; and, according to Heilbrun, their "'open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life"' (pp. 12-13). This is a fitting depiction for this biography. Carlisle describes Packard's story as one of boundaries: intellectual, cultural, and social boundaries; boundaries of gender and religion; definitions of insanity; and boundaries between radical and conservative tendencies. Carlisle also depicts Packard as a woman addressing the central issues of nineteenth-century society and questions fundamental to that society, such as "What civil rights are due married women? What rights and liberties are due those individuals deemed to be insane? What boundaries may a society reasonably impose on an individual's beliefs and behaviors?" (p. 3).

The book opens with Mary Todd Lincoln's involuntary commitment to an Illinois asylum after the assassination of her husband. Fifteen years earlier, Packard was involuntarily committed to the same asylum, by the same asylum director; committed on the basis of a recommendation and evidence provided by her husband. Lincoln (1818-82), wife of the sixteenth president of the United States, committed in 1875, ten tears after her husband's assassination, was able to win her release much quicker and easier by utilizing the reforms that Packard had championed.

Carlisle is sympathetic to the men who oppressed Packard, most notably, her husband and the asylum director; but as the book progresses it becomes more difficult to see these men as well-intentioned although misguided. She notes that the asylum director, Andrew McFarland, "searched in vain" for evidence of Packard's derangement for the first two years of her incarceration (p. 8). Of Packard's husband, Theophilus, Carlisle writes, "of the options available to him, declaring his wife insane was the most practicable and least socially objectionable" (p. 57).

McFarland had adopted the psychiatric discourse of his era. The book describes the objective of McFarland's moral therapy as to model, observe, and encourage patients to behave properly. This seems fitting, as Packard was committed on the basis of behavior that was not in line with the social norms of her era. Nevertheless, her situation worsened in the asylum. For speaking out against McFarland, Packard was "punished." Specifically, she was placed in a ward among "violent maniacs" where she was physically attacked. She also endured medications, such as laxatives, opium, and stimulants.

In 1864, Packard obtained a jury trial and was declared sane. Before the trial ended, however, her husband sold their home and left for Massachusetts with their young children and her personal property. His actions were perfectly legal under Illinois and Massachusetts law. Packard had no legal recourse by which to recover her children and property. This helped fuel Packard's two main passions, asylum reform and married women's rights.

In 1867, Packard was able to generate an investigation of the asylum where she was committed. The investigating committee eventually found that McFarland had failed the public trust, and the investigation itself caused a year of public attention that led to his resignation. Packard also instigated investigation of the entire asylum system in Illinois; an investigation that revealed that 205 patients were admitted "without the proper legal

evidence of their insanity, and the security required by law" (p. 140). The investigation also revealed widespread abuse. For example, asylum attendants reported being trained to know how long they could hold patients under water without killing them, and various forms of torture were found to be used to gain compliance from patients.

Packard became a tireless campaigner for asylum reform and she made a considerable impact on the asylum system in the United States. A number of authors have traced the origin of organized advocacy for patients of psychiatric internment to Packard, including the founding of the National Association for the Protection of the Insane and the Prevention of Insanity in 1880. Furthermore, Packard actively sought safeguards in the commitment process, but also desired private and family care for the "mentally ill."

One of her most substantial achievements was Packard's Law. According to Carlisle's account, asylums had become largely custodial in nature (though it is questionable if they were ever therapeutic). Packard's Law allowed patients to access uncensored correspondence; this was important as postal rights for asylum patients allowed them their only form of communication with the outside world. This right was often the only recourse available to secure legal representation and to contest imprisonment. It allowed patients to contest involuntary commitment, to report abuse, and to garner support, and provided access to legal representation. It is this reform, for example, that allowed Lincoln to secure her release.

It is illuminating to see the extent to which asylum leaders fought postal rights. Psychiatrists and asylum administrators also fought the legislation requiring a jury trial prior to involuntary confinement as asylum leaders were accustomed to substantial power. An irony is that resistance to safeguards, which might have protected the credibility of the system, led to a conservative elitism disassociating their profession from public cries for reform. Additionally, this book illustrates a power dynamic that existed between various groups, such as between the psychiatric profession, the legal system, politicians, and journalists. These various institutions were often at odds, seeking greater influence over public perception and political control. Packard, Lincoln, and many others relied on these various institutions to assist in resolution of their personal plights. Journalists, as one example, did a lot for patients who sought outside support.

Packard hoped to substantially reform the legal rights of asylum inmates nationwide, but her influence and successes were often minimized due to her own label of insanity. Yet she was sophisticated enough to survive independently at a time when society made independence nearly impossible for any woman. In addition, successful reforms were often minimized, and the appearance of jurisprudence was often just a facade. For example, at some trials, individuals were appointed legal representation by those who supported their confinement. Individuals were often not prepared for their trails, and not informed of their rights. But in time, the abuses of asylums were reported in literary and medical journals.

Packard's story is one where institutional power supersedes the rights of individuals. Once individuals were labeled as dysfunctional, they lost their rights. This factor was intensified for women whose rights were defined in relation to men. Packard was forced to rely on men with political power to advocate and implement her policies. She sought counsel of many interesting figures, such as Hon. Gerrit Smith (1797-1874) who helped finance John Brown's abolitionist raid at Harper's Ferry in West Virginia in 1859. Packard also lobbied for a national law assuring asylum patients access to uncensored mail, and met with President Ulysses S. Grant who offered support for her legislation.

Packard's other focus and passion concerned the rights of married women. She worked on legislative reforms and campaigned for married women's rights. She believed married women should have the same rights as single women and that these rights would strengthen marriage. She resonated with early women's rights advocates and Quakers, such as Lucretia Mott (1793-1880). However, she did not advocate rights for women that were equal to those enjoyed by men. Packard proposed a bill in Illinois to cover or protect married women's property rights, earnings, and child custody. She campaigned at the state level, and throughout the western territory. Packard continued to travel and support herself through book sales as she campaigned for married women's rights.

Individuals were resistant to legal control into what was generally considered part of the private sphere; in other words, the power of law was not designed to control a husband's behavior. The legal system of that era refused to challenge male authority. According to Carlisle, "she wanted the law to require her husband to treat her as a 'true woman' and to acknowledge her rightful authority within the domestic sphere" (p. 114). Packard drew from the "Declaration of Sentiments" produced at the Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls in 1848. Packard adopted civil rights discourse, describing her experience with her husband as oppression and tyranny,

but she did not advocate women voting or holding political office. Home was women's "proper sphere" (p. 116).

Once released from the asylum in June 1863, Packard survived through the generosity of family members, but eventually became self-supported by writing books. She had been committed according to manufactured narrative, and struggled to rewrite that narrative. In doing so, she captured the attention of others skeptical of asylums. Her most popular book was *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, an asylum narrative published in 1868. Packard also wrote a 1,600-page work titled *The Great Drama* (1878), recounting a vast array of her life. *The Great Drama* evokes Packard's spiritualism. She wrote of channeling figures, such as George Washington. Like contemporary political movements, spiritualists of the nineteenth century believed our founding fathers would lead us to moral and social order.

Carlisle describes the writing of Packard as "female Gothic," a transgression of "boundaries of the self" (p. 151). This internal struggle was between a desire for domesticity ("true womanhood") and personal liberty. This struggle was common among feminists of that era, including writer Catharine Beecher (1800-78). As a young woman, Packard met Beecher's younger brother, clergyman and abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher (1813-87) as a classmate at Amherst College. She followed his preaching and writing into her adult life, and was also influenced by Catharine Beecher. Packard was very similar to Catharine as she reinforced traditional gender norms while advocating for women's rights. She condemned her opponents as unmanly and lauded her supporters for their manliness.

Many of Packard's views were conflicting or contradictory. On divorce, for example, her stance was mixed; she wrote of her opposition to divorce while filing for her own divorce. Though she did not initially advocate for female voting rights, her experience with backlash against her reform legislation led her to reconsider the issue of women's suffrage. Perhaps some of this contradiction stemmed from a divide between adherence to religious beliefs and her own evolving beliefs resulting from her experiences.

Religion is a consistently recurring theme throughout the book and central to Packard's story, the impact of which Carlisle addresses. Packard was diagnosed as a monomaniac on the subject of religion and with "moral insanity." Moral insanity caused anxiety in religious circles as being simply a new catchall word for sin. In fact, Carlisle suggests that Packard helped to push the psychiatric profession to refine its definitions and treatment of "moral insanity."

Packard's religious views evolved in a manner that others viewed as both sinful and insane. Over time, Packard began to reject the strict Calvinist doctrine that was supported by her husband. Eventually, she took an interest and was influenced by spiritualism, a view that included egalitarian views on women, marriage, and divorce. Packard's spiritualism gave support to her radical ideas and these were based on spiritual insights that she regarded as superior to her husband's. Carlisle suggests that it was through religion that Packard rationalized or justified many of her changing beliefs. Although the interest in spiritualism caused discord in her marriage, it was not until later in life that she rejected spiritualism and this was motivated on a philosophical basis. Even in letters and petitions supporting Packard's commitment to women's rights, there was often a message beseeching her to repent.

Carlisle does not present Packard as a simplistic hero or victor, but she does show that Packard certainly persevered over the men who oppressed her. In 1891, McFarland hung himself in a room at a retreat, and his second wife accused him of physical and emotional abuse. A mental health center in Springfield, Illinois, is named after him. Packard's husband, Theophilus, was eventually forced to relinquish control of their children. He died in poverty, a broken man.

This book transcends biography to capture a broad spectrum of history. Several authors have broached Packard's circumstances, but Carlisle has written the most comprehensive account to date. The book develops chronologically according to Packard's life. Carlisle does not ignore the contradictions in her source material. She is clear from the outset that events are interpreted differently among the various vested interests.

Carlisle has a background in library science, her research skills and extensive archival work are evident throughout the book. Carlisle draws on a vast range of rich primary source material. These sources include Packard's own writing, asylum reports, newspaper articles (both national and local), diaries, legislative committee reports, and secondary literature. The breadth and depth of Carlisle's research is impressive. Her bibliography is an excellent contribution in its own right.

This book does not make a strong original theoretical contribution. Questions that have guided historical analysis, such as the perspective of psychiatry as a benevolent progressive profession versus a complex mode of social control, are set aside. Still, Carlisle has surveyed

extensive secondary literature and the book is informed by this work. This includes seminal works on asylums, such as David Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum* (1971) and Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1961). Theoretical frameworks from literary symbolism, gender studies, and feminist authors also inform the book. These frameworks appear throughout the book to help better understand Packard. For example, theorists are presented who see her as an emblematic "figure who struggled to reconcile conservative and radical tendencies" (p. 13).

Carlisle does not seek to hold the definitive voice or presentation of Packard. She views her book as a springboard for future scholarship. The book should appeal to scholars of history, literature, psychiatry, disability studies, gender and women's studies, and cultural studies. The accessible prose makes the book well suited to undergraduates while the sophistication of the content make the book appealing to graduates and faculty. The book is very accessible, well written, and extremely well documented.

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