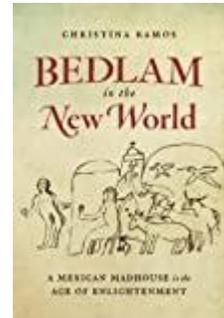**Christina Ramos.** *Bedlam in the New World: A Mexican Madhouse in the Age of Enlightenment.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022. xiv + 250 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-6657-0.

Reviewed by Rebekka Michaelsen (University of California, Los Angeles)

The title of Christina Ramos's new study—*Bedlam in the New World: A Mexican Madhouse in the Age of Enlightenment*—promises a rich institutional history of an often-overlooked asylum. This Ramos skillfully delivers, but her book offers scholars so much more. Ramos not only paints an artful portrait of Mexico's Hospital de San Hipólito but also takes careful pains to define and highlight complex relationships in the imperial community. Placing the hospital in conversation with the Inquisition and Mexico's secular criminal courts allows Ramos to make a larger argument about the surprising role of medicalization in the Hispanic Enlightenment.

Founded in 1567 and in operation until 1910, San Hipólito has the distinction of being the first asylum for the mad in the New World. By focusing on this pioneering institution, Ramos challenges Mexico's absence from the conventional origin narrative of psychiatry, which traditionally roots the birth of psychiatry in Europe, specifically France and England, and during the Enlightenment. While Ramos's origin narrative maintains a temporal focus on the Enlightenment, she expands the story by decentering not only Europe but also the traditional protagonists—physicians—in her analysis of medicalization at San Hipólito. Instead of focusing on physicians and philosophers, Ramos looks to religious figures, such as the inquisitors and brothers of the Order of San Hipólito, as the progenitors of the medicalization of madness in colonial Mexico. In this way, Ramos challenges the perceived mutual hostility between the Enlightenment and the Catholic Church by demonstrating that religion played a key role in the proliferation of scientific modernity. Ramos thus convincingly argues for San Hipólito as a colonial laboratory of the Hispanic Enlightenment.

Ramos states her intention early on: to "write a hospital history that was peopled with patients," a promise she more than fulfills (p. xi). From presenting a mad embroiderer who made pornographic sketches to a *mestiza* servant who claimed carnal knowledge of the devil, Ramos peoples her study with a wide range of colorful characters, including a troubled mulatto miner, a blasphemous

mad friar, a soldier who was a fan of Voltaire, and an Indian with designs on nobility. Perhaps the most intriguing is the mad embroiderer, José Ventura Gonzalez, whose salacious sketches survive in the records of the Inquisition and are reproduced and analyzed in Ramos's text as an example of evidence the Inquisition used to prove disordered thoughts.

Using San Hipólito's rich institutional records complemented by Inquisition and secular criminal court records, Ramos skillfully traces the medicalization of madness. Chapter 1, "Bedlam in the New World," summarizes San Hipólito's founding by reformed conquistador Bernadino Alvarez in 1567 and traces the hospital's history up until the early eighteenth century. Relying on two posthumous biographies of Alvarez and hospital statutes, Ramos argues that by providing *cardidad* (charity) to the *pobres dementes* (mad paupers), San Hipólito, even as a carceral institution that used restraints and force, legitimized both the Catholic Church and the Hapsburg Crown.

Chapter 2, "An Enlightened Madhouse," focuses on the extensive eighteenth-century renovations to San Hipólito, which were completed in 1777. Highlighting both church and state efforts to reform the Order of San Hipólito, the religious order that managed day-to-day hospital operations, this chapter positions hospital renovations within the so-called Bourbon Reforms, wide-ranging changes meant to reconfigure the colonies' relationships with the metropole. As the Spanish Empire embraced modernity, Ramos argues, a reform of Catholicism was central to the Spanish Enlightenment.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the Inquisition and its relationship to San Hipólito. While the richly detailed records of the Inquisition have long been an important source for historians, Ramos uses the correspondence and trial transcripts for a new purpose. She convincingly shows how the Inquisition drove the medicalization of madness in colonial Mexico. In doing so, she demonstrates that the Inquisition was not the anti-Enlightenment force it has long been assumed to be. In fact, the Inquisition, as an institution that sought to understand humankind's interiority, necessarily embraced the insanity defense. As lay witnesses were traditionally unreliable, Inquisition courts relied more and more on medical experts' testimony to determine responsibility. Finally, chapter 5 explores the shift at San Hipólito from a hospital intended to shelter and care for the *pobres dementes* to a custodial place in which to incarcerate insane criminals for the secular criminal courts.

Ramos's conclusion, "A Defense of Bedlam," covers the hospital's financial precarity amid the age of revolutions and Mexican independence up until its closure with the foundation of Mexico's modern psychiatric hospital—La Casteñada—in 1910. Ramos ends by challenging the celebration of modernity represented by La Casteñada at the expense of San Hipólito by reminding readers that the medicalization of madness began much earlier in the eighteenth century.

Bedlam in the New World is a compelling study of the medicalization of madness. Ramos makes important contributions to the historiography of psychiatry, the Enlightenment, and colonial Mexico. By tracing the medicalization of madness in colonial Mexico with an analysis of secular and religious institutions as well as San Hipólito patients, Ramos provides a model of scholarship that will appeal to a wide range of scholars interested in histories of medicine.

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