



Paul Newman, *A History of Terror. Fear & Dread through the Ages*. Foreword by Colin Wilson. Great Britain 2000. xviii + 236 pages.

What did the earlier generations fear most in their lives? Were the medieval man's worries and anxieties similar to those of his descendants or have the changes in the physical environment and the mental structures been so enormous that our fears are nowadays completely different? These are some of the questions that come to mind when one starts to read Paul Newman's book *A History of Terror — Fear & Dread through the Ages*.

The subject is no doubt interesting, yet the title promises a bit too much respective of the contents. It is of course difficult to present a survey of "fear and dread through the ages" that covers all cultures and all time periods, which is why one should perhaps not blame the author for the fact that the point of view in his study is to a great degree that of a European or, more precisely, that of a West European. But since the focus is openly on the European development, it is difficult to comprehend why the Antiquity is given so little attention. One might suppose that the Greek myths and tragedies would offer a lot more than some brief remarks on the god Pan and panic as one of the manifestations of fear. Furthermore, since the study is constructed chronologically, it remains unclear why the chapter, which according to its title should deal with the Middle Ages, pays at least as much attention to the conditions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It even seems as if the writer considers the great witch persecutions as being characteristic of the medieval culture, although large-scale witch-hunts were rather a phenomenon of the Early Modern period. Moreover, the handling of the topic is often uneven and unfocused: the reader faces a number of details, some of which are macabre descriptions on massacres and other miseries, yet the unity and the bigger picture cannot easily be discerned here.

Some of the results presented by the author have been said earlier by other scholars. Nevertheless, the bibliography appears surprisingly short. Although the study dedicates a lot of space to that of the most common fears among us, the fear of death, such names as, for instance, Philippe Ariès, Michel Vovelle or Norbert Elias are not among the authors cited. It is also odd that one cannot find Paul Barber's *Vampires, Burial and Death* (1990) here either, although Barber in a fashion similar to Newman utilises the misunderstandings of the decaying processes of human

corpses as an important explanation on the origins of the vampire beliefs. Similarly, it is peculiar that Newman speaks of "landscapes of fear" while analysing a pre-industrial environment as a mental threat to man, but without any reference to Vito Fumagalli's study (1994), which deals with the same topic and which even bears the very same phrase as its title.

It is to be commended that Newman also analyses illustrations, and that is why the book contains all in all twenty-six black and white pictures providing a hint of how earlier generations visualised their fears. That Albrecht Dürer is slightly over represented, with four pictures, is probably due to economic reasons: it is more convenient to publish reproductions of wood cuts and engravings on copper than richly coloured paintings. But since the study also covers romanticism and perceptions of wilderness, one would expect that at least one of the works of the famous German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774—1840) had been included or at least mentioned. Moreover, the source information concerning some illustrations is a bit inaccurate.

Although Newman's study does not meet all scholarly standards, one has to admit that his book is very inspiring and offers a personally written general outline of the place of the uncontrolled in the Western view of the world. The foreword written by Colin Wilson is also worth mentioning, because it complements beautifully Newman's description of the birth of the Gothic Novel.

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