

This analysis lends further weight to a growing body of material concerned with the links between the medical and the literary realms. In the diagnosis of disease, and in the language used to describe it, literary scholars and doctors participated in a shared system of meanings. By approaching heart disease through perceived conjunctions of the meta-physical and the literal, Blair incidentally raises pertinent questions about the relationship between feeling and representation. Of “heartache”, she asks, does the loss of love manifest itself in the breast because the metaphor of heartbreak has taken on some materiality, or does the metaphor itself stem from the bodily location of such pain?

Such philosophical speculations aside, this is primarily a literary work, explicitly focused on how writings on the heart were shaped, “in form and metre”, by broader cultural assumptions about the role of the organ (p. 3). As such, it provides invaluable insights into the narrative treatment of the heart by selected writers—most notably by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, and Alfred Tennyson. Yet the sophistication with which Blair tackles her subject means that what could have been a narrowly literary analysis also becomes an important reference point for historians of medicine, gender, religion and literature.

There are some points where I might disagree with Blair on detail, including her analysis of the feminization of heart disease throughout the nineteenth century, and the lack of specificity with which she addresses concepts of “functional” as opposed to “structural” disorders. There are also some question marks over Blair’s analysis of medical developments more generally. But these criticisms are outweighed by the strengths of the book. This is a rich and detailed analysis of the language of the heart and its disorders at a particular moment in Victorian literary history. As such, it is a well-written and learned book, which makes an important contribution to many aspects of nineteenth-century studies.

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**Solomon Posen**, *The doctor in literature. Vol. 1: Satisfaction or resentment?*, Oxford and Seattle, Radcliffe Publishing, 2005, pp. xv, 298, £29.95, \$55.00 (paperback 1-85755-609-6).

**Solomon Posen**, *The doctor in literature. Vol. 2: Private life*, Oxford and Seattle, Radcliffe Publishing, 2006, pp. xv, 298, £35.00, \$59.95 (paperback 1-85755-779-3).

Most medical schools now provide undergraduate modules on the eclectic discipline known as “medical humanities”, and there is a definite gap in the market for an engaging, rigorous textbook on the subject of medicine in literature. Unfortunately for Solomon Posen, *The doctor in literature* is not it.

Posen—a retired professor of general medicine at Sydney University—studied English before taking his medical degree, and has maintained an interest in literature throughout his career. In *The doctor in literature* he aims to expand on his series of articles on ‘The portrayal of the physician in non-medical literature’, published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* in the early 1990s. These volumes are conceived as a reference work, one which brings together “some 1500 passages from approximately 600 works of literature describing physicians, their attitudes and their activities” (vol. 1, p. 1). Most of these works are British or American in origin, and the majority were written in the last two centuries. The first volume examines literary representations of medical practice, and the second addresses the private lives of fictional physicians. A third volume, ‘Career choices’, is scheduled for publication later this year. Posen seeks to identify broad themes in literary portrayals of physicians, and in doing so to provide both “source material for courses in medical ethics and sociology” and a browsable volume for the general reader (vol. 1, p. 3).

In this sense, *The doctor in literature* follows a familiar strand of antiquarianism in the history of western medicine, one which seeks to draw guidance for modern medical practice

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from the literary and philosophical canon. In his foreword to volume 1, Edward Huth, editor of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, sets out the book's explicitly didactic topos: "If we know how we are seen by the rest of the world, we may be less prone to conduct ourselves in ways at odds with our professional values . . . Dr Posen's book will not purge our profession of scoundrels, professional cripples [*sic*] and incompetents. But those of us who keep an open mind about what we are and what we might do to be worthy of a place in our profession may profit" (vol. 1, p. viii). Huth suggests that *The doctor in literature* "might be seen as an informal social history of medicine from the past to the present" (vol. 1, p. ix). Posen's own views on the history of medicine are unreconstructed, to say the least: "the basic relationship between patients and trained expert helpers" has, he claims, "remained essentially unchanged over two and a half millennia" (vol. 1, p. 8).

Posen's approach to literary sources is equally problematic. He seeks to disregard "unanswerable questions like whether works of fiction create or reflect attitudes" (vol. 1, p. 12). But such questions are central to the success of his enterprise. Can one really claim that George Eliot's Edward Casaubon, for example, embodies a moral lesson for present-day practitioners, when treated in effective isolation from the fact that he is a central character in *Middlemarch*, that most celebrated and complex of Victorian novels? Can an account of Virginia Woolf's Sir William Bradshaw ignore Woolf's own experiences at the hands of Sir George Savage and others? Can one draw any useful conclusions on 'The wayward wife' from the

disparate works of Giovanni Boccaccio, Arthur Conan Doyle, Anton Chekhov, Arthur Schnitzler, Somerset Maugham and Tennessee Williams?

This analytical naïveté is also reflected in Posen's self-imposed limitations. He excludes "overt medical autobiographies"; "fictional physicians whose medical qualifications are relevant only as a plot device" (so no Dr Watson or Dr Jekyll); "medical clowns and caricatures"; "fictional physicians who engage in criminal activities"; and "bizarre medical behaviour" (so William Burroughs' Dr Benway is out on three counts). He also seeks to exclude discussion of "hidden meanings, symbolism [and] allegories" (vol. 1, p. 7) in representations of medical practitioners. With so many dimensions of literature left out, one is tempted to ask, "What remains?"

What remains is a repetitious and loosely disciplined parade of gobbets, deprived of their literary and historical context and hence shorn of their value and interest. Posen's analyses and conclusions are conservative, trite, judgemental in tone, scarcely meriting the hundreds of pages and thousands of citations invoked in support. *The doctor in literature* can claim some value as a bibliography of "mainstream" representations of physicians in modern western literature, but readers may care to think twice before paying £65 for information already widely available online. This fascinating subject deserves, and will receive, better treatment than Posen has administered.

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