

Book Reviews

Sandra Cavallo and **Tessa Storey** (eds), *Conserving Health in Early Modern Culture: Bodies and Environments in Italy and England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. xvi, 328, £70.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-5261-1347-4.

The six non-naturals – air, food and drink, sleep and waking, movement and rest, retention and evacuation, and the emotions – are the focus of this outstanding edited collection, which emerged from a conference on ‘Healthy living in pre-modern Europe’. The non-naturals had their roots in ancient medicine, were standardised in works by Arabic medical authors, were central to medieval regimens of health, and continued to underpin the approach of early modern people to maintaining and restoring health. They can be, and have been, presented in slightly different ways by both scholars and early modern writers. The editors of this volume frame them as breathing, eating and drinking, sleeping, exercising, cleansing the body, and managing the passions of the soul; and characterise them as ‘spheres of life’.

The book focuses on the period from 1500 to 1800, and opens with an introduction by Sandra Cavallo on the role of the non-naturals in early modern culture and society, arguing for their importance in social and intellectual life as well as their medical significance. The ten chapters, written by a group of highly regarded scholars, are organised into five parts: preventive literature; the vulnerable body; airs and places; spiritual and bodily health; and spaces, paintings and objects. They refer to a number of beautiful plates and figures – especially of the paintings and objects discussed in the final section.

Many of the volume’s most important contributions relate to the subtle and rigorous interrogation of the non-naturals. The authors evaluate how the non-naturals had more than one function in conserving health. As well as being used for therapeutic purposes, they had a diagnostic role as signs which indicated the body’s state of health, and they were managed as a strategy to prevent ill health and sudden death. We gain a sense of the specific significance of each non-natural. In the case of excretion, a non-natural which is often neglected by scholars, perhaps because it is less prominent in modern ideas of healthy living, we learn of its importance in a wide range of circumstances. Leah Astbury explains its meaning for new-born infants, and how the act of crying was believed to reduce their excessive moisture. Hannah Newton argues that a final, gentle, purge after illness was thought essential to avoid relapse. Tessa Storey explores why moderate evacuation was recommended in the context of coitus. The volume also has important things to say about air. Chapters by Sasha Handley, Frances Gage and Maria Conforti highlight the increased prominence of air in considerations of health in the later part of the early modern period. Several contributors make nuanced distinctions between the influence of Hippocratic and Galenic views of air. Tessa Storey shows that Hippocratism played different roles in England and Italy, influencing classification in the former, and prompting an appraisal of the relationship between body and locality in the latter. The close attention that is dedicated to each of the non-naturals allows the authors to reflect on their relative role and significance. Cavallo contends that we should not necessarily conclude that diet was considered to be the most important non-natural because it takes up most space in medical writings. Moreover, close readings of these texts reveal that early modern people were more interested in the sequencing of interventions which targeted the non-naturals than in

placing them in a hierarchy, and that they thought closely about the interaction between different non-naturals.

The book makes important methodological contributions through its critical assessment of the wide range of sources which inform our understanding of early modern health, from regimens and childbearing manuals to personal correspondence and household objects. The diversity of the evidence enhances the interdisciplinarity of the volume. In terms of written sources, the authors urge us to pay closer attention to genre as we use medical texts. Maria Pia Donato explores genre with particular sensitivity, noting the importance of subgenres of regimen – like plague treatises and Lenten diet tracts – and tracing change over time with acuity. With regard to material culture, Marta Ajmar's imaginative chapter on a hot drinking vessel argues that we shouldn't merely seek to 'read' an object, but can try to 'experience' it as well. Experience is also an important theme for Frances Gage, who thinks about how paintings were used to evoke positive emotional responses in seventeenth-century Rome. Objects also played an active role because, when observed and experienced, they helped to share health-related values.

The clarity and readability of this book are striking, and reflect superb editing. The precision with which contributions to historiographical debates are articulated is particularly helpful. The reader repeatedly encounters a vivid detail: a recipe for a paste to fill the joints of your bed to exterminate bedbugs; the early eighteenth-century concern that the new fashion for wigs impeded evacuation through the hair; or how Eleonora Boncompagni Borghese sent chocolate to her grieving daughter to console her for the loss of her son. The editors express a wish to stimulate ideas and ongoing discussion. They will succeed on both counts. The volume will inspire continued scrutiny of the relationship between the health of the individual and the health of the population and how it shifted over time. The comparative approach – achieved through a mixture of chapters about one or both countries, or places within them – will prompt future scholars to think comparatively, to interrogate the significance of locality in health practices, and to ask valuable questions about the intersections between climate, politics, religion and health.

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Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 544, £45.95/£24.95, hardback/paperback/ebook, ISBN: 978-0-231-16496-2 / 978-0-231-16497-9 / 978-0231-53832-9.

One of the most important scholars of Tibetan and Buddhist studies of the past generation, Janet Gyatso charts what is new territory for her in the history of medicine with *Being Human in a Buddhist World*. This is a beautifully produced, amply illustrated, and well documented history of Sowa Rikpa (the 'Science of Healing') that charts Tibetan medicine's secularising (albeit incomplete) divergence from Buddhism by the seventeenth century. Previously, Gyatso had been primarily interested in the visionary dimensions of Tibetan Buddhism starting with her Berkeley PhD thesis on the fifteenth-century visionary saint Tangtong Gyalpo (1981). This focus continued with her first edited book *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism* (1992), which focused on Buddhist notions of memory (*smṛti*). Her contribution