

portions of text which had been excised by 1560 and tables of changes introduced between one edition and another. Hobby has painstakingly collated some fifteen different editions, but leaves it to others, should they wish, to draw their own conclusions as to the significance of the numerous small changes.

Hobby's (and/or Ashgate's) decision to organize the volume primarily so that the general reader can peruse it comfortably and conveniently may occasionally frustrate those of who work closely in this field, but on balance I think it is justified, for this is a work which made a major contribution to the circulation of knowledge about sexuality and reproductive medicine from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, and thus deserves as wide a readership as possible. And it is important to stress that Hobby has certainly not compromised the quality of her scholarly research. This volume has surely set the agenda—and a very high standard—for a pan-European study of the reception of Rösslin's *Rose Garden*.

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G M P Loots, *Epilepsie in de zestiende eeuw. De Observationes van Pieter van Foreest*, Rotterdam, Erasmus Publishing, 2007, pp. 219, €27.50 (paperback 978-90-5235-189-6).

Pieter van Foreest (Petrus Forestus) has been called the “Dutch Hippocrates”. He studied in Bologna, Padua and Paris, and practised in the Netherlands from 1546 until his death in 1597. During these turbulent years, he was consulted for the health of the leader of the Dutch revolt, Prince William of Orange, and performed his autopsy after he was murdered. His *Observationes* contain over 1,350 case studies and were published between 1584 and 1597. In the past fifteen years, some thorough studies have appeared on Foreest, notably those of Henriette Bosman-Jelgersma. The present translation of the *Observationes*

on epilepsy by the classicist and psychologist G M P Loots makes a welcome addition.

The introduction to Foreest's life relies primarily on earlier studies by Bosman-Jelgersma. The *Observationes* themselves are an absolute joy to read. There are patients from all classes of society: a shoemaker, a sailor, a monk, a noble woman, and a relatively large number of young adults and children. A few of the patients are related to Foreest. Some are described as socially isolated, “melancholic”, some do not take his therapy, others respond well, leaving the public amazed at their cure and giving Foreest a sense of satisfaction. Of special interest is ‘Observation 60’ in which Foreest is consulted by his colleague Nanno, to which Nanno's reply is also added.

Each case study is followed by a theoretical “Scholium”. Foreest mentions several “risk factors” for epilepsy such as having had an alcoholic mother, or living in the province “where the wines are damp”. A teacher suffered epilepsy from intense teaching, a student from eating excessive amounts of eel. Symptoms are described as convulsions, frothing at the mouth, etc; but also as pain between the shoulder blades and vomiting, seeing flashes of light, and having bloody urine. In many cases, patients describe a sensation rising up from the extremities towards the brain. This is interpreted as confirming classical pathology, where a bad humour rises up from some place in the body towards the brain. Foreest distinguishes epilepsy from drowsiness, obsession by the devil and stroke.

The *Observationes* show Foreest as having a sympathetic, independent mind. A high point is ‘Observation 62’, where he calls in a second doctor “to be safe against false charges” from the family of the patient. In his language, Foreest is more careful than, for example, Vesalius (whom he met in Padua and later consulted about a patient), but is not afraid to criticize Galen and the Paracelsists among others. He makes some witty allusions to the frustrations of religious clerics.

Cauterization, although proved to be effective

in Italy, is inappropriate in the Netherlands according to Foreest because the local people find the treatment “*abominabile*”. He mostly quotes from Greek sources, but is quite neutral in quoting Arabic sources such as Rhazes.

The publication is accessible in price, design, structure and use of language. The decision to edit the punctuation of the Latin has proved successful. The book has a useful index of Latin terms translated into Dutch, although a larger general index would have been helpful.

Almost half of Loots’s introduction is devoted to a comparison of Foreest’s work with that of three Dutch contemporaries, Pratensis, Lemnius and Heurnius. The results are, however, not very exciting. The space taken up by this comparison could have been used to give a better analysis of the text itself, and more background on the social and intellectual environment in which Foreest worked. Some more insight could have also been offered into Foreest’s prescriptions, which take up a large part of the *Observationes* but remain incomprehensible. Loots is successful in correcting the opinion that Foreest wrote the *Observationes* without didactical intentions, but the discussion itself could have been explained more adequately.

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Reid Barbour and Claire Preston (eds),
Sir Thomas Browne: the world proposed,
Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. xii, 368,
£60.00 (hardback 978-0-19-923621-3).

Reid Barbour and Claire Preston consider the seventeenth-century physician, linguist and natural historian Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682) to have written probably the most remarkable prose in the English language. In this volume, Browne is celebrated as both a literary and an intellectual figure across sixteen chapters by British and American scholars engaging with his imaginative and eloquent meditations upon a

number of wide-ranging themes including memory, authority, classicism, disease, witchcraft and historiography.

In her chapter, Preston explores the medical, anatomical, natural-historical, spiritual, antiquarian and literary aspects of Browne’s *A letter to a friend*. For Preston, this advice to a fellow knight dying of the wasting disease phthisis comprised a profound *ars morendi* wherein the specifics of an individual case history gave way to a consideration of general truths. That is, for Preston, Browne was ultimately concerned with providing impersonal *sententiae* addressed to public patterns rather than a *consilium* addressed to private virtue. Reid Barbour’s contribution considers Browne’s fascination with skin as a site for decipherment of the hieroglyphics of nature, rather than merely as a physiological object of medical knowledge. For Barbour, we are to regard Browne’s explorations of artistic, moral, theological and racial implications as “larger meanings of skin” than his concerns with anatomy, healthy function and disease. Browne is presented here as ultimately having regarded the skin as holding more secrets about the human decipherer than about the divine geometer. In Barbour’s reading of *Christian morals*, God had ensured that “pocked and scarred” humans loved one another not by obscuring the signs inscribed upon the surface of bodies but by ensuring “that the reader [was] short-sighted” (p. 292).

The volume’s historiographical approach is set out in the introduction, where Barbour and Preston casually dismiss what they choose to call a “neo-historicist focus upon subversion and the structures of power” without exemplifying it beyond a 1987 essay by the Australia-based novelist Michael Wilding. Barbour and Preston do not engage with Wilding’s argument but merely report that it is “reductive” and that he sees oppressive conservatism where they see coherent, orderly and co-operative “social and moral advancement” (pp. 2, 4). The editors signal an intention to use Quentin Skinner’s perspective of “language as action”, and the volume indeed pursues a hermeneutic reading of