

## Book Reviews

more context would have been useful. *Frontier doctor* is an outstanding and stimulating contribution that can be enthusiastically recommended to those interested in Beaumont or early nineteenth-century American army medicine and physicians' careers.

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**Diana E Manuel, *Marshall Hall (1790–1857): science and medicine in early Victorian society*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine (Clio Medica 37), Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, Rodopi, 1996, pp. xiii, 378, illus., Hfl 60.00, \$40.00 (90–5183–905–7).**

Even though Marshall Hall's father was a bleacher, in the eyes of many influential members of the medical profession his son always remained something of a black sheep. In the culture of medicine, Hall cottoned on fast: an Edinburgh MD, followed by Nottinghamshire public and private work, followed by a successful transition to London medical practice. After an opening biographical account, each of these periods in his high-flying career form the early chapters of Manuel's biography. She also shows, however, that Hall was never solely interested in acquiring the staple of a medical living. From the outset, he wanted those much more fancy and finished polite physicians' goods: literary reputation, Fellowship of the Royal Society, and access to its prestigious *Transactions*.

Hall's fluency with the pen on the subjects of diagnosis and the diseases of women and children helped him spin a number of convincing medical yarns from the raw material of his early medical experiences gained in hospital, dispensary and private sick room. Later he took up physiological research and began to focus on the reflex function of the spinal nervous system. Thus Hall chose a subject with even more woofs and warps than his overwhelming sense of importance as its

self-proclaimed progenitor. And so, like many a manufacturer's son who thought he cut a fine figure in London clothes bearing the "Discoverer" label, he found himself unravelled. His social betters, competing with him for footnotes as well as fortunes, failed to acknowledge and print the fashionable Nottinghamshire designer of the "true spinal system". Some even said it was stolen from a much earlier Eastern European Prochaska show. Hall's relations with the distinctly unimpressed Royal Society and his work on the nervous system constitute two later chapters of Manuel's book.

Her final chapter recounts Hall's later years, including a trip to America, writings on slavery, resuscitation and various other remnants he patched together at the last moment. Thus Manuel has chosen the standard and well-tried pattern for relating individual to context. This could be summarized as: general biographical outline, detailed analysis key episodes, and "Final Years" (ch 6) considered as a last days-last work summary. The end result is a well printed calico which covers Hall usefully and adequately. By the same token, it is unlikely to be paraded on the catwalks of the history of medicine for its innovative treatment and stylish writing. The same biographical details are often rehearsed in several places, and the balance of detail between the analysis of Hall's views and the details of the various controversies he changed in and out of is very much in favour of the latter.

Manuel does draw on a variety of modern scholarship to illuminate Hall's career during his London period, when he struggled unsuccessfully for a permanent post which combined practice and teaching at a large hospital-based medical school. However, elsewhere, there is insufficient reference to and use of history of medicine writings published after the mid-1980s, and greater awareness of wider material about early Victorian culture would have helped turn this book from an off-the-peg study to an eye-catcher. Less calico and more batik, in which the social and personal dimensions of Hall's life run into one another, would certainly have livened the show.

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In several senses, Hall cuts a better figure here than in Charlotte Hall's *Memoirs*. Nevertheless, the remnants of the earlier "spouseography" are often still visible, despite Manuel's apparent awareness of the historiographic implications of using Charlotte's work as a primary source (p. 23). Some instances are trivial. For example, Hall's trip to the Scottish Highlands is alluded to by Manuel as if it had already been described (p. 14), but this is done only in the *Memoirs*, not in her account. Other showings have more serious implications for not only the accuracy of Manuel's details but also the analyses of Hall's early intellectual allegiances which she builds upon them.

The Halls did not marry until 1829, and Charlotte had no first-hand knowledge of her husband's Edinburgh days. However, it will strike most readers as odd to find Andrew Fyfe is still described by Manuel as "the son of the Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh" (p. 7). A bit more basic research into Hall's early teachers, the medical institutions of Edinburgh, and the University matriculation records, would have eliminated a number of other confusions perpetuated in Manuel's work. These include those between James Hamilton the elder, the hospital physician who wrote on purgative medicines, and James Hamilton Jnr, son and successor of Alexander Hamilton, Professor of Midwifery; between the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, where midwifery was not practised in Hall's time, and the Edinburgh Lying-In Hospital, where it was under the Hamiltons; and between misinterpretations of courses such as "medico-chirurgical obstetrics" for the separate, "Clin[ical] Medicine, [and] Obst[etrics]" he actually took in 1811 (along with the "Pr[actice of Medicine]"). So by all means view Hall in his new dress, but it might also be wise to have the spouseographer standing by in case a quick change of swimwear is required—not to mention Hall's drowning manual if it all proves too much!

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**Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon,**  
*Opera: desire, disease, death*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. xvi, 294, illus., £38.00 (0-8032-2367-6).

Belatedly we are realizing that there is much more to opera than "just" the music. Published correspondence, for example, has already shown how profound the influence of the composer can be on the all-important libretto: how Verdi coerced Piave, and even Boito, into sharpening a libretto, or how the more emollient Richard Strauss coaxed his prickly aristocratic collaborator Hugo von Hofmannsthal into eliminating some of his more complex symbols.

Such an analysis has now been extended to disease as portrayed in opera from the mid-nineteenth century to today. The Canadian husband and wife authors (he a physician, she a literary theorist) concentrate on three medical obsessions of the period: tuberculosis, cholera, and syphilis. Portrayals of the first, they show, have varied from the beginning of their period (*The tales of Hoffmann* and *La Traviata*), when the nature of consumption was unexplained, to later, when the meaning of Mimi's symptoms in *La Bohème* was all too evident, given Koch's discovery of mycobacteria. The fulminations of Victorian clergymen that cholera was a divine punishment of the lower classes for debauchery typified the traditional conjunction of pestilence with immorality and were to be echoed in two twentieth-century operas, one with a bisexual protagonist, Alban Berg's *Lulu*, the other with a homosexual one, Britten's Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*.

Nevertheless, the most valuable section of the book is devoted to syphilis. Though this is mentioned as afflicting Lulu and her lover and in the final scene of Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* has caused Tom Rakewell's general paresis, the authors concentrate on Amfortas in Wagner's *Parsifal*. For in an era when syphilis was a dominant social concern—and in a year when both the opera and Ibsen's *Ghosts* were first produced—audiences were hardly likely to misinterpret the nature of Amfortas's symptoms. His spear wound (which Wagner