

Book Notices

JAMES RICE, *Dostoevsky and the healing art: an essay in literary and medical history*, Ann Arbor, Mich., Ardis, 1985, 8vo, pp. xviii, 352, illus., [no price stated].

In what is easily the most complete medical history approach to Dostoevsky, Professor Rice has exhaustively examined the impact of epilepsy upon his life, consciousness, and art, against a richly sketched-in background of nineteenth-century clinical and popular ideas about the affliction. Professor Rice also centrally examines Dostoevsky's incorporation of his own medical condition (and sickness in general) into his literary imagination, stressing his vision of epilepsy as a sacred disease and exploring the interplay in his writing between mental disturbance as a mark of innocence or holiness, and as a sign of decadence. Appendices print in full Dostoevsky's diary accounts of his own seizures. This is a full, sensitive, and scholarly study.

JEAN CÉARD (editor), *La folie et le corps*, Paris, Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1985, 8vo, pp. 262, Fr. 90.000 (paperback).

This is a welcome collection of essays, mainly by literary historians examining the understanding of madness and folly in major literary texts chiefly of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Though some of the pieces betray a rather modish obsession with linguistic ambiguity, and also lean too heavily upon the often ahistorical perceptions of Michel Foucault, there is much that is illuminating, in particular, two essays on love, melancholy, and madness (Marie Paule Duminiel's 'La mélancolie amoureuse dans l'Antiquité' and Claude Thomasset's 'L'amour "heroïque" à travers le traité d'Arnaud de Villeneuve'). Of more direct interest to the medical historian will be Paul-Gabriel Boucé's important investigation of madness and masturbation: 'Les jeux interdits de l'imaginaire: onanisme et culpabilisation sexuelle au XIII^e siècle', which fruitfully explores early modern theories of the power of the imagination.

PETER V. TABERNER, *Aphrodisiacs. The science and the myth*, Beckenham, Kent, Croom Helm, 1985, 8vo, pp. x, 276, illus., £19.95.

We lack an informed modern interpretative history of the use of drugs as would-be aphrodisiacs and the involvement of the medical profession in remedying sexual defects and fulfilling sexual dreams. Until that is written, Peter Taberner's expert assessment of today's range of aphrodisiacs from the critical viewpoint of the laboratory scientist contains enough on the classic aphrodisiacs of the past – from magical charms, to herbs and roots such as mandrake and ginseng, narcotics such as opium, and "social aphrodisiacs like alcohol" – to make interesting reading to the historian of medicine. In the case of practically all the classic aphrodisiacs, clinical trials have shown them utterly ineffectual or, if producing some effect, at least highly ambivalent in those effects (as the porter in *Macbeth* pronounces verdict on liquor: "Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes"). This raises extremely interesting questions (not answered here) as to why it was that particular substances were assumed to have venereal properties.

JACQUES ANDRÉ, *Les noms des plantes dans la Rome antique*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1985, 8vo, pp. xvi, 332, Fr.350.00 (paperback).

This valuable work, by an eminent editor of Pliny's *Natural history*, is greatly to be welcomed. Its cautious identifications of plants mentioned by Latin authors demand respect, if not always assent, for well before Matthioli in 1554 there had been disagreements between botanical philologists, and Matthioli's contemporaries were far from sure that he had always pointed the way to truth. Professor André's qualifications should also be noted. This book does not list the medical uses of plants nor every single occurrence of a word in Latin. André confines himself largely to citing early references and survivals in late Latin (although more might have been made of Pelagonius). Words in, for example, Gaulish preserved in late authors are also omitted, as are the names of fruits and of parts of plants. Greek authors are often quoted to indicate knowledge of a plant within the Roman (bilingual) world, although

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there is the occasional inconsistency. Where, for example, is the notorious “stratiotes” of Anonymus Londinensis VI.22. oddly translated by Jones as “duckweed”? But these quibbles should not be allowed to diminish one’s gratitude for a handy and clear work of reference.

BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED

(The inclusion of a book in this list does not preclude the possibility of subsequent review. Items received, other than those assigned for review, are ultimately incorporated into the collections of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.)

WILLIAM BEATTY, *The death of Lord Nelson. The authentic narrative by his surgeon*, London, Stobart, 1985, 8vo, pp. 95, £4.25 (paperback).

ANTONIO CARRERAS PANCHON, *Joaquin de Villalba (1752—1807) and the origins of Spanish medical historiography*, Universidad de Malaga, 1985, 8vo, pp. 173, [no price stated] (paperback); Joaquin de Villalba, *Epidemiologia española*, facsimile of 1803 ed., with introduction by Antonio Carreras Panchon, Universidad de Malaga, 1985, 8vo, pp. 209, [no price stated] (paperback).

VICTOR GONG (editor), *Understanding AIDS. A comprehensive guide*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 8vo, pp. xxiii, 240, £17.50.

CHRISTIAN HELFER, *Lexikon auxiliare. Ein deutsch-lateinisches Wörterbuch*, Saarbrücken, Verlag der Societas Latina, Universität des Saarlandes, 1985, 8vo, pp. 470, DM.70.00.

EVELYN FOX KELLER, *Reflections on gender and science*, New Haven, Conn., and London, Yale University Press, 1985, 8vo, pp. viii, 193, £17.95.

GERHARD KOCH, *Die Gesellschaft für Konstitutionsforschung*, Erlangen, Verlag Palm und Enke, 1985, 8vo, pp. xxv, 306, illus., DM.30.00.

CLAUDIA PANCINO, *Il bambina e l’acqua sporca*, Milan, Franco Angelli, 1985, 8vo, pp. 261, L.20.000 (paperback).

VINCENTE COELHO DE SEABRA, *Elementos de chimica* (facsimile of 1788 ed.), Coimbra, Portugal, Departamento de Química, Universidade de Coimbra, 1985, 8vo, pp. xviii, 485, illus., \$10.00 (paperback).

THOMAS M. SHAPIRO, *Population control politics. Women, sterilization, and reproductive choice*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1985, 8vo, pp. x, 220, \$24.95.