

offering close, interpretative readings of the texts she has chosen to discuss, and its clear argument and elegant execution make it a rewarding read.

**Erin Sullivan,**

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the  
History of Medicine at UCL

**Andrew Mangham,** *Violent women and sensation fiction: crime, medicine and Victorian popular culture*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. ix, 247, £50.00 (hardback 978-0-230-54521-2).

Analysis of the impact of gender upon perceptions of anti-social behaviour has long been a topic of interest not only to historians of medicine, but also to those exploring the wider relations between gender, culture and society. The concept of the mad Victorian woman, the treatment of her condition and her apparent removal from mainstream society has proved to be of captivating interest. Andrew Mangham's choice of topic might therefore seem unusual considering its location within such a richly explored and well-analysed field, and his claims that concepts of violent femininity were central to nineteenth-century culture do not initially appear potentially novel.

However, the strength and originality of Mangham's study lies in his successful use of an inter-disciplinary approach whilst dealing with a diverse range of intellectual areas of inquiry. While many historians of medicine, in their search for knowledge, are often reluctant to remove their gaze from traditional resources such as medical journals and hospital records, often producing somewhat dry accounts of concepts of health and disease, he successfully reconciles the connections between our standard sources with new ones typically shunned by more snobbish historians of medicine, such as popular sensation fiction.

In *Violent women and sensation fiction*, it is argued that legal events in the Victorian courtroom, medical theories of female

insanity, and fictional popular narratives had a massive impact on one another. Mangan's decision to add the dimension of legal history to the more customary, and much-explored, combination of science and literature suggests fresh possibilities for those seeking new avenues of exploration within the history of medicine. However, instead of simply exploring previously unnoticed connections between the three spheres, he goes further by showing how particular medico-legal issues of the mid-Victorian period were in fact crucial to understanding the novels of authors such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Henry Wood and Wilkie Collins.

Mangan's choice of popular fiction is also effective, as is his argument that as these novels reached a wide Victorian audience it is difficult to understand why these resources have not been fully scrutinized academically. Fiction such as Wilkie Collins's *The woman in white* spearheaded a popular genre of sensation fiction that portrayed women in the throes of acts of criminal insanity. Furthermore, these literary works are inevitably firmly linked to other aspects of the larger culture within which they were embedded, including those not obviously directly related to literature.

The content itself proves of morbid interest, as the author goes through a repertoire of sinister crimes committed by a variety of violent Victorian women of different ages, ranging from pyromania, teenage cannibalism, road murders, crimes of passion and vampirism. These representations were all bound by the common thread of the popular image of the mid-Victorian female as prone to mental problems—an image which works with fluidity across generic and disciplinary boundaries. Mangham adds to our knowledge of female insanity by exploring how these fields were linked, and where and how they operated.

Crucially, this book does not present itself as a vague account of cultural history. Mangham outlines in detail the real events and theories that inspired a variety of sensation novels. He chooses the mid-Victorian period,

rather than the *fin-de-siècle*, as the violent women spoke to a number of the era's specific ideologies where the destructive woman held particular poignancy. Violent women were given more attention in the media of the period because they related to, supported, and allowed writers to explore a number of established beliefs, ensuring that sensation fiction was a fertile mode of expression by the 1860s.

Ian Miller,  
University of Manchester

**M A Katritzky**, *Women, medicine and theatre, 1500–1750: literary mountebanks and performing quacks*, Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. xvi, 367, illus., £55.00 (hardback 978-0-7546-5084-3).

In 1617 the physician John Cotta warned readers of the dangers involved in consulting female medical practitioners: “here therefore are men warned of aduising with women counsellours . . . their authority in learned knowledge cannot be authentically, neither hath God and nature made them commissioners in the sessions of learned reason and vnderstanding” (p. 10). With access neither to university training nor to medical apprenticeships, women might be accused of “busie meddling” with the infirm or even of engaging in heresy or witchcraft. In *Women, medicine and theatre, 1500–1750*, M A Katritzky argues that quackery provided an unofficial route for women to enter the domains of both medical activity and theatrical practice. As scholars have underestimated links between the history of medicine and the history of performance, the medical activity of women is a neglected source with potential to illumine the place of women on the late medieval and early modern stage.

Katritzky uncovers detailed evidence relating to female quackery in travelogues, diaries, letters and physicians' accounts.

Mountebanks are traditionally regarded as a male category of healers, but, Katritzky argues, many in fact performed as husband-and-wife teams. Literally mounting trestle tables or benches in order to attract purchasers, they performed free at both indoor and outdoor venues, especially urban fairs and markets. Women charlatans tailored their services to female patients, providing midwifery and dental care, developing sophisticated placebo treatments, and offering early forms of counselling. Entertainers as much as healers, they often carried exotic or trained animals such as monkeys, snakes, scorpions, lizards—or the “skilfully fettered live fleas” (p. 92) observed by Thomas Platter among a Burgundian troupe in 1597. Sometimes staging full plays, and routinely inviting the interactive participation of their audiences, the real therapy they dispensed was perhaps the *antidotum melancholiae* provided by laughter and music.

Some of Katritzky's most interesting examples deal with off-shoots of mountebank activity. One chilling account by Johann Beer, published in 1683, describes the death of the “flying” doctor Charles Bernoin. Famous for his expertise in lithotomy and cataract surgery, the 58-year-old showman and surgeon offered sensational performances designed to showcase his supernatural medical prowess. Audiences would watch him ingesting hot oil and melted lead, and then treating himself onstage with his patented medicines. Bernoin fell to his death from a tightrope in 1673 onto the paving stones of a square in Regensburg when his firework-powered flying act went tragically wrong. Beer is as critical of Bernoin's spectacular arts as he is of performances by itinerant actresses and singers encountered in the streets, regarding their activities as threats alike to public order and decency.

Katritzky traces the history of mixed-gender mountebank activity alongside the emergence of women on the secular and religious stage. Medieval Easter plays often included a comic interlude caricaturing quack doctors and their wives. One play performed at