

## Book Reviews

comprehend the subtleties of the history of sexuality, and its diverse psychological profiles: protean in sexuality's ability to disguise and transform itself while appearing as merely another internalized habit.

So it was for the erotic Mann, who indulged his secret habit every week, every day, almost every hour of his life from early adulthood, and then retired, Kant-like, to the daily serenity of his orderly writing table and favourite pen. Mann's *habit* based on (what we would label) erotic homosexual attraction became his characteristic psychological insignia: specifically, the homoerotic moment framed by the *male-male* gaze, fleeting in its concorde brevity, fundamentally aesthetic for the sparks of pleasure it afforded Mann, regenerative in paving the way for his next paragraph or chapter, always politically charged and encoded in the symbolism of social class given the young men who attracted him, but rarely genital or indulging the physical tactile sense that granted would allow none of the lingering erotic desire implicated in the above crucial fallout of the encounter itself. This sequitur and fallout is what mattered to Mann. It counted more than any tactile fulfilment because these components of the secret fed directly into his literary art. After all, it is the *male-male* gaze between Aschenbach and Tadzio that virtually defines *Death in Venice* and Hans Castorp and his cousin Joachim in *Magic mountain*.

Heilbut therefore provides his readers with a gift in the form of research and discovery. The only appropriate readerly response is applause for, and gratitude to, him for his honest labours in Middle European archives and the superb revaluation he brings to the protagonist and his large oeuvre. More locally within this journal's pages Heilbut's *tour de force* serves to remind us that we have hardly exhausted the approaches to a territory as complex as the history of medicine which will always dwell on human beings, great and small. Book publication cannot, of course, always aspire to this crucible of detective work and discovery. If it did, we might have less publication than we do ( a condition to be desired), and more of

it conducted at this stratospheric level of revelation.

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**Nancy G Siraisi, *The clock and the mirror: Girolamo Cardano and Renaissance medicine*, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. xiv, 361, illus., £37.50, \$49.50 (hardback 0-91-01189-3).**

A new book from the pen of Nancy Siraisi is always a welcome event for historians of medicine, and this lively study of one of the most intriguing physicians of sixteenth-century Italy does not disappoint. Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) has usually been studied as a somewhat eccentric natural philosopher and mathematician, or as the author of a famous autobiography. Siraisi examines his career as a professor and practitioner of medicine, an enthusiastic participant in the humanist recovery of ancient texts despite his limited linguistic skills.

There seem to be no great quantities of unpublished Cardano manuscripts surviving, partly because there was a lively trade in his papers among publishers after his death, so the modern historian has no privileged private view of Cardano's life. Nevertheless, the epistemological stance adopted by Cardano in his many treatises, elevating his own experience to the status of an authority, provides the historian with a wealth of autobiographical anecdotes and case histories that illuminate the style and circumstances of his practice. Such tales are well suited to the concerns of social historians, so there is a danger of being seduced by Cardano's version of events. Siraisi draws attention to his construction of medical narratives, but she sometimes seems to accept his account of the result of a therapy or autopsy at face value.

Siraisi's great expertise in medieval and Renaissance medicine creates a rich context for Cardano's ideas, but the biographical focus of this book enables her to demonstrate how his medical ideas sprang as much from his practice

as from his broad reading. She shows just how central to his thought were Cardano's neglected commentaries on the Hippocratic Corpus. Like every commentator since antiquity, he recast Hippocrates in his own image to justify his own ideas. Siraisi's consideration of Cardano's belated adoption of anatomical practices is also especially welcome, focusing on his rhetorical use of autopsy to vindicate his diagnostic pronouncements and promote his clinical practice.

Cardano did not sit comfortably within any of the disciplinary discourses of his day, for all his desire to be accepted. An autodidact and a mathematician, he had an unusual approach to many problems and he argued his position in clumsy and rebarbative prose instead of deploying scholastic logic or humanist rhetoric. His heroes were Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Plotinus, rather than Aristotle and Galen, but he sought the reform rather than the destruction of scholastic philosophy and medicine. He was not averse to ascribing occult causation, and he collected talismanic gems, but he attributed lovesickness and impotence, from both of which he suffered himself, to humoral rather than hidden causes. In discussing demons and incantations, he steered a middle course between the Platonism of Ficino and Fernel and the sceptical Aristotelianism of Pomponazzi. His work on the praeternatural was consequently as useful to orthodox demonologists as it was to sceptics.

The encyclopaedic interests and idiosyncratic positions of Cardano have made him as difficult for historians to pigeonhole as he was for his contemporaries. Although renowned and reviled as an occult philosopher, he can hardly be described as a Neoplatonist. Despite his stress on observation, he remained deeply indebted to medieval authorities. As a result of this complexity, Siraisi's study, for all its many virtues, cannot be regarded as the last word on Cardano's medical practice and ideas, or their interaction with other aspects of his thought. Siraisi gives due attention to dietetics and the interpretation of dreams, but she barely touches on the possible influence of his interest in physiognomy and judicial astrology on his

diagnostics and therapeutics. The vast range of topics discussed by Cardano provides innumerable ways in which his works can be used to shed light on Renaissance medicine.

Cardano's posthumous notoriety, not as a medical practitioner but alongside Agrippa and Paracelsus as one of the anti-Christian occult philosophers, or deluded natural magicians, or heroic precursors of freethinking, has survived for a surprisingly long time. Siraisi's study is not shackled to such hoary projects and their baggage of myths. Instead, she has produced an admirable example of the social history of ideas, integrating the contingent circumstances of individual biography with the larger forces of cultural change and social construction.

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*Thomas Wharton's Adenographia, first published in London in 1656*, translated by Stephen Freer, with an historical introduction by Andrew Cunningham, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. lxxxiii, 609, illus., £85.00 (0-19-854788-9).

Those who wish to have access to a modern English version of one of the most important works on anatomy published in England in the mid-seventeenth century will be much indebted to Stephen Freer, for this excellent translation of Thomas Wharton's work on the glands, and to Dr Christopher Wharton (a descendant of Thomas) for commissioning Freer's work. It is reproduced with a photographic image of each page of the original on the left-hand side and the English translation on the facing page. Readers can therefore easily compare Freer's version to the original. Although Freer is not explicit about his method, it is clear that he has (rightly) chosen to translate the sense rather than the words. For example, he renders "Est autem fateor, scruposa hæc sententia, multisque objectionibus obnoxia" as "But this opinion, I admit, is hard to take, and open to many objections" (pp. 111–12). On the other hand, where possible confusions might arise, he indicates them clearly: "aliud nimirum