

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.

Abdul Haq Compier,
Free University, Amsterdam

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

Browne. There is a concomitant concern with symbolism and meaning (rather than practical and material technologies) across ten of the sixteen chapters, with some employment of Wittgensteinian notions of language (chapters 6 and 8). Only the last two of the sixteen chapters in this volume offer an argument for how their literary and intellectual descriptions of Browne might serve as reflection upon twenty-first-century notions of sickness, mortality, memory, authority and identity. That is, most of the contributors do not demonstrate how their readings of Browne are important critiques of certain aspects of current practices that constitute our selfhood. Browne's medical arguments are presented in such a way as to leave the present somewhat unchallenged. Presumably, we are not to question current medical beliefs, but instead to use them to assess those of the past. This is unfortunate given that this volume is precisely an engagement with ethical and aesthetic truth together with related subjectivities. Notwithstanding this, the contributors provide a wide-ranging, finely-detailed, lucid and highly readable account of the writings of Sir Thomas Browne in relation to the pressing spiritual and political problems of seventeenth-century England.

Steve Ridge,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the
History of Medicine at UCL

Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen and Karl A E Enenkel (eds), *The sense of suffering: constructions of physical pain in early modern culture*, Intersections, Yearbook for Early Modern Studies, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2009, pp. xxiii, 501, €99.00, \$148.00 (hardback 978-90-04-17247-0).

The sense of suffering is a fascinating study of the perception and experience of physical pain in early modern England and Europe. It contains seventeen chapters written by scholars from a range of academic backgrounds, including history, art history,

literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, and law.

The book is groundbreaking in four respects. Firstly, it focuses specifically on early modern pain. Previous histories of pain, such as Roselyn Rey's *The history of pain* (1993), have tended to take broad sweeps of history from ancient times to the present day. Secondly, the book does not confine itself to just one or two contexts in which pain was present, such as torture or surgery, but instead examines suffering in a variety of arenas, including politics, law, art, literature, medicine, religion, philosophy, and education. Thirdly, whereas many scholars have explored the history of emotional pain, including grief, fear, and jealousy, very few have concentrated on the subject of physical pain. The editors of *The sense of suffering* believe that this is a consequence of today's preoccupation with mental suffering, and assert that "Early modern perceptions of pain frequently work in precisely the opposite direction: they invoke the physicality of pain to invest other, non-bodily categories of experience with the authority and palpable reality of bodily sensation" (p. 6). Finally, the volume focuses on the experiences of sufferers as well as the views of those inflicting pain or debating the meanings of pain. Consequently, *The sense of suffering* is perhaps the most ambitious of all existing studies of pain: its authors believe that it is possible to access the experience as well as the meanings of pain.

A central theme throughout the book is the intimate relationship between the early modern mind and body, and between physical and emotional suffering. As the editors state in the introduction, "Pain . . . confronts us with basic questions about the relation between body and mind, and challenges common-sense dualist assumptions about the nature of physical and mental experience" (p. 1). This thesis is upheld by many of the authors. Michael Schoenfeldt, in his chapter on pain management in medicine, states that early modern people "did not make a hard and fast distinction between physical and emotional pain", as demonstrated by the fact that "the vocabularies of suffering continue to migrate