

Book Reviews

pharmaceutical industry. Part of the reason why foundations supported reproductive research, Clarke suggests, was because they felt it was the ultimate way to achieve biological control over populations, an aim dear to their hearts at this time. Even more striking was the gradual rapprochement between the reproductive scientists and the once-suspect world of birth control activists, which led to reproductive scientists becoming “integral parts of family planning, population control and infertility research worlds, where they remain today” (p. 28).

This exhaustively researched, thoroughly documented and well-organized study of a crucial but virtually unexplored area of American science should become essential reading for historians of the life sciences. Like any worthwhile work of scholarship, it does not simply tell an interesting story and offer analytical insights but raises interesting research questions for future work. Why, for instance, did American reproductive scientists eschew questions of human sexual orientation and behaviour while continental European biologists did not feel too many qualms about addressing them? Clarke is to be thanked for compelling us to think about such issues and her admirable study will provide a point of departure for those wishing to explore other dimensions of this complex and fascinating subject.

Chandak Sengoopta,
Wellcome Institute for the History of
Medicine

Milton Lewis, *The thorns on the rose: the history of sexually transmitted diseases in Australia in international perspective,* Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1998, pp. xxii, 574, Austral. \$69.95 (0-644-36085-2).

The thorns on the rose is a wide-ranging study which aims to locate the Australian experience of sexually transmitted diseases

(STDs) within both an historical and a comparative perspective. Throughout the book, Lewis is concerned to establish the links between European and Australian discourses surrounding STDs, and the early chapters are devoted to contextualizing the development of epidemiology and control policies in nineteenth-century Australia, with particular emphasis on the ideology and outcome of contagious disease legislation and the efforts of Western societies to regulate prostitution. There follows an exhaustive survey, at both the federal and state levels, of the impact of new chemotherapies and diagnostic techniques on treatment regimes and public health policies in the early 1900s, along with an assessment of the role of other factors such as the social purity movement, eugenics, and the exigencies of war.

Lewis's treatment of inter-war developments adheres to a similar format with a review of Australian initiatives juxtaposed to a survey of developments in Western Europe and the USA and international co-operation on issues of social hygiene. Particular attention is paid to the impulses and constraints shaping health education programmes and to the ongoing debate over the relative merits of compulsory and voluntary control strategies. Two further chapters are devoted to the impact of penicillin and the “permissive society” on the treatment and control of classic venereal diseases as well as of the second and third generation of STDs during the period 1945–80. Shifts in the incidence and epidemiology of STDs are related to the vicissitudes in the status and resourcing of venereology as a speciality, to the application of less coercive methods of STD controls such as contact tracing, and to broader societal shifts in sexual mores.

A much-needed and highly illuminating chapter is devoted to the impact of STDs on Aboriginal society in Australia from the nineteenth century to the present day. Lewis addresses wide-ranging issues relating to the incidence and epidemiology of STDs among

Book Reviews

Aborigines, the repercussions of European contact for levels of native infection and the racial discrimination inherent in the coercive regulations adopted to isolate Aboriginal victims of the disease. More contemporary concerns over the prevalence of HIV/AIDs in the Aboriginal people provides a preamble to a general consideration of the social and governmental responses to the “modern plague” since the early 1980s. The stress here is placed on the shift from “authoritarian contain and control strategies” to an emphasis on “cooperation and inclusion” designed to modify health-threatening patterns of sexual behaviour.

There are aspects of this volume that disappoint. The introduction does not convincingly locate the study within the wider historiography of STDs. Moreover, although there is a mass of contextual material on Europe and the USA, it is not always subjected to the sort of comparative analysis that might throw light on the social, political and cultural factors which explain variances in STD control strategies. There is a great deal on the parallel history of STDs elsewhere, but little on the patterns and processes of the diffusion of medical and social hygiene ideas. Even within Australia, one is left wondering why states varied in their public health responses. Moreover, although it is stressed that STD history must be analysed within its socio-cultural context, there is insufficient, discrete attention to issues of class, gender and generation within the social politics of STDs in Australia.

None the less, this is a very ambitious volume and has many strengths. Milton Lewis has an enviable grasp of the medical aspects of his subject and provides the reader with a clear and accessible analysis of the scientific advances in venereology, as well as a range of invaluable quantitative evidence on the incidence of STDs in Australia since the nineteenth century. Finally, and most importantly, state and federal policies are disaggregated and local case studies admirably synthesized. As a

result, a wealth of research material has been given broader exposure that will long be quarried by medical historians.

Roger Davidson,
University of Edinburgh

Roy Porter and G S Rousseau, *Gout: the patrician malady*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. xiv, 393, illus., £25.00 (0-300-07386-0).

James Gillray’s 1799 engraving *The gout*, depicting a devil breathing fire and attacking the great toe joint with sharp teeth and barbed claws epitomizes the pain of acute gout. There can be no more appropriate illustration for the dust jacket of a book on the history of the disorder and it is no surprise that Porter and Rousseau, like W S C Copeman for his earlier *A short history of the gout and the rheumatic diseases*, 1964, made this choice. There the similarities end. The latter work, according to Porter and Rousseau (p. 286, note 9), is overtly Whiggish and suffers from a lack of references and inaccurate quotations. The authors are brave men in raising the latter point but this reviewer is not about to check their copious quotations. There can, however, be no doubt that they succeed in remedying the other deficiencies with appropriate scholarship, a comprehensive index, 38 illustrations, 40 pages of notes, and a 72-page bibliography, including, *inter alia*, 28 works from the sixteenth century, 76 from the seventeenth, 255 from the eighteenth and 161 from the nineteenth.

The authors acknowledge reliance on the Burney-Fraser [*sic*] Collection on Gout and Arthritis in the Texas Medical Center Library, Houston, which is probably the world’s largest such special collection, although the Heberden Library in London is not far behind. Both catalogues can be accessed on the Internet: the Burbank-Fraser Collection (BFC) at <http://>