

Book Reviews

R W McConchie, *Lexicography and physicke: the record of sixteenth-century English medical terminology*, Oxford Studies in Lexicography and Lexicology, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. xii, 448, £60.00 (0-19-823630-1).

Language use is even more central to the practice and theory of medicine, or indeed any other kind of healing, than it is to other sciences and activities that require a specialized lexicon. As the author of this valuable study remarks, in medicine, "language is both tool and product simultaneously". As psychosocial and psychoneurological explanations become ever more persuasive within orthodox Western medicine, historians, sociologists and anthropologists of medicine need to engage in more precise analysis of the linguistic practices of patients and practitioners. Roderick McConchie's purposes in this study are rather more restricted, but his work offers both tools and salutary advice for scholars engaged in explanatory work.

The title, *Lexicography and physicke*, indicates the two main directions in which this study faces. On the one hand, the author provides a telling analysis of both early vernacular lexicography and the failings of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which historians all too often take as authoritative in such matters as the earliest usage of a word or the scope of the lexicon. On the other hand, he makes a considerable contribution to discussion of the role of vernacular writing in English medicine, the evolution of the technical vocabulary, and the problem of medical authority. In both respects, this substantial study cannot be taken as the last word, but should rather be seen as indicating important areas for further research and as providing a useful methodology.

Even more striking than some of McConchie's discursive sections is his careful analysis of some representative texts, locating vast numbers of antedatings, new senses, and unrecorded usages, for both technical and non-technical terms. As one might expect, Shakespeare is frequently supplanted as first recorded user of a word, as is the anatomist

Helkiah Crooke. Botanical, chemical and medical terms are frequently identified for the first time or antedated by as much as three centuries, as a result of the way the *Oxford English Dictionary* was originally produced. Even a cursory reading of this book should prevent historians from making incautious remarks about the introduction of new terms or the limits of the vernacular lexicon. Since there is now a widespread desire to avoid terminological anachronism in the history of medicine, lexicographical analysis is clearly essential.

Although this book has much to say to historians, it is not the work of a historian of medicine, so there are some odd judgements, minor factual errors, and curious omissions. It is hardly surprising that McConchie is unaware of many relevant biographical details, especially concerning religious and political loyalties, since he is often dependent upon dated secondary sources, which have failings of which he is well aware. For example, as a Member of Parliament, the early Paracelsian propagandist Richard Bostocke is not quite as obscure as McConchie supposes. Moreover, he has not always taken into account studies that would be pertinent, such as Vivian Nutton's essay on humanist surgeons. Nevertheless, his unusual perspective and painstaking research enable McConchie to make a host of stimulating comments which have implications for all who study the theory and practice of medicine in the past.

David Harley, Oxford

Thomas M Daniel, Frederick C Robbins (eds), *Polio*, University of Rochester Press, 1997, pp. viii, 202, illus., £20.00, \$29.95 (1-878822-90-X). Distributed in UK by Boydell & Brewer Ltd., P.O. Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF.

Kathryn Black, *In the shadow of polio: a personal and social history*, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1996, pp. ix, 307, illus., \$12.00 (0-201-15490-0).