

Book Reviews

important study and obligatory reading for anyone looking at portraits of doctors and scientists.

Christopher Lawrence,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL

Julie V Hansen and Suzanne Porter, *The physician's art: representations of art and medicine*, Durham, NC, Duke University Medical Center Library and Duke University Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 141, illus., £37.00 (hardback 0-9672946-0-6), £19.95 (paperback 0-9672946-1-4).

The physician's art is the catalogue of an exhibition of over 100 images and other objects from the collections of four North Carolina medical schools. In a finely-judged Preface, structured around specific examples shown, Martin Kemp points out some of the historical issues involved in the study of medical imagery and artifacts, beginning with the problem of what "realism" means in the context of anatomical illustration. "No image ever exists within a purely neutral field, no matter how hard its originators may think they are trying." Kemp argues for the central interest of the "period style", or "look"; by attending to *how* things are represented (or decorated), as well as *what* is represented, we are better able to appreciate the political, professional, and philosophical currents that gave the "social fields" of production their dynamism, and grant the art its active, not merely illustrative, participation within the fields. Inevitably, some of this subtlety is then discarded in Hansen and Porter's catalogue entries, which, covering as they do a very wide historical and geographical range, cannot assume much knowledge on the reader's part: they have to explain a lot, and do so neatly if not infallibly. That (cat. 17) on Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), for example, seems uncertain whether

acknowledging the book as a "thinly disguised offering to . . . King James" (meaning Charles) disqualifies it from a similarly active rôle in subsequent anatomical investigations, but the royal interest scarcely hurt the scientific cause in the lively social field that was Restoration England.

The exhibition was organized in five categories: 'Art and anatomy', 'The surgical arts', 'The doctor's practice', 'Obstetrics and gynecology', and 'Non-western medicine'. Such categories cannot, of course, be definitive or mutually exclusive, but the rationales for this organization (or for the ordering of exhibits within it) are not immediately clear from the catalogue: an English domestic medicine cabinet (c. 1830), for example, appears as part of the "doctor's practice", though one might think it a testimony to lay practice. A section devoted to childbirth makes sense given the ingenuity historically devoted to demonstrating its mechanisms, but by implication obscures pregnancy's prominence in representations elsewhere in the show—we begin to suspect that, like the BaKongo of the Congo (cat. 54), Europeans are ritually inclined to classify medical concerns two ways, into reproductive ones, and the rest. Such speculations are prompted by an elegantly designed and beautifully illustrated catalogue; but catalogues cannot be read as free-standing studies might.

Christine Stevenson,
University of Reading

Michael J A Howe, *Genius explained*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. ix, 221, £35.00, \$54.00 (hardback 0-521-64018-0), £12.95, \$19.95 (paperback 0-521-64968-4).

In this ambitiously-titled book, Michael Howe takes on one of the great unanswered, perhaps unanswerable,

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questions. He claims to offer more convincing explanations of extraordinary achievements than the usual fall-back option of attributing whatever it is that we may term “genius” to some mysterious, magical, undefined “special innate gift”. Howe thus adds his contribution to the nature versus nurture debate. Can people be born geniuses? The simple answer, in Howe’s account, is no. The whole work is dedicated to proving that sophisticated inborn capacities cannot exist, and concludes that the difference between creative problem-solvers and ordinary people lies far more in the degree of effort rather than in the presence or absence of any innate ability. Yet throughout the book, Howe is careful to point out that his approach to analysing genius does not seek to detract from the idea that geniuses are special.

Howe is a Professor of Psychology at Exeter University. As a scientist, he is attracted by the desire to quantify and explain; he admits that he is daring to tread where others have deemed the terrain impossible. Defining the terms of reference, especially the term “genius” itself, in such a project is exceedingly difficult. Howe determines to consider in his study any individual whose claims to genius have received a substantial measure of support—i.e. those about whom the term “genius” may be popularly used. In his analysis Howe advocates employing the disciplines of biography (using evidence of the genius’s early advances and circumstances to reveal the origins of his or her genius), and psychology (which he defines as the ways in which people are affected by their biology and their influences). This psycho-biographical approach he admits is necessarily limiting. Detailed biographical information on a person’s early childhood is distinctly scarce for many of the early historical geniuses. Thus he is compelled to confine himself to a survey of obvious characters principally from the nineteenth century (such as

Charles Darwin and George Stephenson), and the twentieth century (for instance Albert Einstein).

This book does not pretend to explicate how contemporaries may have employed the term genius to describe the prestigious people of their times. Hence, while undoubtedly of great value for a psychologist, the place of this book in the library of a medical historian is unclear. Howe’s intention was not to write history; he looks back on the past two centuries with the values and knowledge of the late twentieth. Yet it does have uses for the historian: it is an enjoyable, fluently-written survey, providing interesting overviews of the early lives of some of the most famous figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his own terms, Howe has explained genius, but to use the term historically as he defines it is anachronistic. The reader should keep in mind that Howe’s book is and was intended to be a product of late-twentieth-century psychology and the study of biography, rather than an accurate reading of the term “genius” in history.

Caroline Essex,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History
of Medicine at UCL

Galen, *Galen. Tome II: Exhortation à l'étude de la médecine. Art médical*, ed. and trans. Véronique Boudon, Collection des Universités de France, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2000, pp. 454, Fr 400 (hardback 2-251-00483-1).

The Budé edition of Galen has started off with a big bang with two introductory treatises of very different types and with very different problems for an editor. That Mme Boudon has managed to resolve them and to offer her readers enlightenment on so many aspects of Galen, and of textual