

## Book Reviews

It is a good book, but the competition in the field is fierce. Those interested in the subject who would like to read some of the newest books in the field should also consider Daniel Moerman, *Meaning, medicine and the 'placebo effect'* (2002) and Harry A Guess, *et al.*, *The science of the placebo* (2002).

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**Michael J Lepore,** *Life of the clinician*,  
University of Rochester Press, 2002, pp. xiii, 459,  
£40.00, US\$45.00 (hardback 1-58046-116-6).

This is a case of life after death and death after life. Michael Lepore was a distinguished American internist who first appeared on the historical scene with *Death of the clinician: requiem or reveille?* (1982) Rather less than an historical study, it was more of a sustained tirade, supported by examples from the past, against the full-time clinical professorial system that slowly and with much strife entered American medicine after the famous Flexner report of 1910. Lepore was unashamedly very right wing in that book and a staunch defender of what he considered traditional American values clustered round the idea of freedom. In this current work he has given us what he saw as an objective history of his life. His death in 2000 precluded him seeing his own past in print.

If not quite a rags to riches story, Michael Lepore's life was not that far from it. Born in 1910, he was the son of first generation Italian immigrants to New York City. His father ran an ice business. This was not an office job; from dawn till dusk he carted blocks of frozen water around the Big Apple. In fact the first few chapters of this book, which are not about medicine at all, are engrossing reading about life in early twentieth-century Harlem. Lepore showed himself to be a gifted child who chose a career in medicine. He was a graduate of the relatively new Rochester School of Medicine and completed his internship at Duke University Hospital. After that the bright young man was

rewarded with a fellowship at Yale studying physiology. He returned to Duke but Italian matriarchal forces were so powerful an influence that he went back home to private practice in the Bronx. Too ambitious for such a sheltered life, at the end of the thirties Lepore was also practising at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Centre and was increasingly, but not solely, concentrating on gastroenterology. The Second World War disrupted this upward mobility although in the end it facilitated it. Lepore served most of the war at the Valley Forge General Hospital in Pennsylvania. The last year of the war, however, and a little after, were spent on Pacific islands. After this, a successful return to New York followed with appointments at various hospitals and a Park Avenue practice. Lepore became a star (he ran a successful, educational, medical television show). He numbered President Hoover among his patients.

There are several points the potential reader might want to know about this book. First, it is an insiders' guide to making a career in twentieth-century American medicine. As such it is a valuable historical document. Second, Lepore's hero is William Osler. Lepore portrays himself as a true disciple, which for him meant that the bedside and clinical individualism came before anything else. Like his first book then, this volume is a sustained political polemic: against the Democrats, government involvement in medicine, the full-time system, etc. Third, for a book that tirelessly preaches the virtues of service and humility in the doctor it seems extraordinarily full of hubris. Pursuing his Oslerian theme, Lepore fills a great deal of this volume with case histories, all of which testify to his skills in bedside diagnosis. There are no mistakes in this book, no apologies, no confessions in any sphere—clinical, administrative, domestic—that I, Michael J Lepore, got it wrong, ever. Finally the author has not been well served by the press of his alma mater. Some ruthless sub-editing with a scalpel would have got rid of the tiresome repetitions. There is no index.

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