

## Book Reviews

medical procedures some curious practices were and in some cases still may be found: for example the belief that treatments are affected by the phases of the moon, or that a worm in the tooth causes the ache.

Chapter Five deals with herbal, animal and mineral protective agents from the folk pharmacopoeia, the latter partly used for antiseptic and styptic effects. Her concluding chapter on empirical and magical practices draws the reader into a world of mystical and superstitious cures.

A number of striking illustrations in the appendix present a vivid picture of folk medical practices. Grabner, herself an art historian, makes use of such iconographic evidence to extend our insight into folk medicine. Her book is a wide-ranging and important compendium of research on folk medicine focusing on its naturalistic aspects. Despite the absence of a bibliography, it is rich in facts and examples, drawn not only from other German-speaking areas but from all around the world. This is a book for everyone interested in folk medicine.

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**Christoph Mörgeli** (ed.), *Europas Medizin im Biedermeier: anhand der Reiseberichte des Zürcher Arztes Conrad Meyer-Hofmeister 1827–1831*, Basel, Schwabe, 1997, pp. 814, illus., SFr 80.00, DM 96.00 (3-7965-1033-7).

Meyer-Hofmeister's travel-accounts are sure to appeal to anyone interested in the history of medical practice, the history of the body or the history of acute physical discomfort. I read this book on holiday and found it not only more compelling than the novels I had packed for light entertainment but also well worth every ounce it added to my luggage—a considerable achievement given that the book measures three bricks in size. This lavishly illustrated and richly annotated edition of a Swiss physician's medical *Wanderjahre* through Germany, Austria, Italy,

France, England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Netherlands offers a vivid portrait of the diverse forms of medical practice, education and thought cultivated in Europe around 1830.

Although Mörgeli, the editor, treats the diary as a kind of unmediated representation of the state of medicine in *Biedermeier* Europe, I would argue that its strength lies in precisely the opposite direction, namely in its being a highly selective representation of Europe as it appeared to a man who was, on Mörgeli's account, as archly *Biedermeier* as they come (p. 19). For those unfamiliar with the term, *Biedermeier* refers to a social-cultural movement associated with the values of inwardness, domesticity and political provincialism which flourished in Germany roughly between 1815 and 1848.

Consider, for example, the following account of an instrument in use at one of the German spas. In Meyer-Hofmeister's words: it is "shaped liked a penis . . . and water squirts out the far end. A woman who wants to use it holds the cylinder between her labia and water is pumped more or less vigorously as required in the circumstances". A bell allows patients to signal when the water-pressure is agreeable and the resident physician "dares not administer this marvellous treatment to unmarried women" (p. 306). For the author, not a hint of scandal attached to this treatment or the establishment in which it was employed.

Such passages, and there are many more, reveal that the diary not only provides a reflection of the state of European medicine but of the author himself, not so much as a psychological subject but as a cultural one. Yet without a general understanding of the *Biedermeier* phenomenon, the reader is left guessing at how any given observation might be representative of the more general cultural situation. And Mörgeli does not come to the reader's aid. Nor should he, given that he is less interested in the general situation than in the specific meaning of "*Biedermeier* medicine" as understood by a highly specialized audience of medical historians.

So it is regrettable that Mörgeli has removed all portions of the diary not of immediate

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medical concern. Long passages on Europe's theatres, public parks, social gatherings and much much more are missing. This editorial intervention exaggerates the text's medical character, reduces its cultural resonance and perforce, frustrates those of us with a sufficiency of *Biedermeier* in us to be driven towards a more complete identification with the interiority of this delightful author.

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**Patricia Fara**, *Sympathetic attractions: magnetic practices, beliefs, and symbolism in eighteenth-century England*, Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. xiii, 327, illus., £35.00, \$45.00 (0-691-01099-4).

For historians of science, natural philosophical interest in magnetism has not been strongly associated with the eighteenth century, so that the agenda for this book may not seem a promising one. The seventeenth century opened with the publication of the influential work by William Gilbert, and magnetism continued to be prominent in important works of natural philosophy and cosmology: Kepler and Halley were among those for whom it was a central interest. The nineteenth century saw the development of a systematic study of the magnetic properties of the earth and the establishment of specialized observatories for the purpose, as well as the bringing together of electricity and magnetism in a new theoretical conjunction. Between these epochs, we are unsure what to make of the eighteenth century and it is left in awkward silence and neglect. Even the instruments seemed to languish in a state that, so far as navigational compasses were concerned, was judged deplorable at the time. Here again it was the nineteenth century that witnessed substantial change with the development of recording magnetometers and the great improvement of the marine compass by William Thomson.

Patricia Fara is determined to give eighteenth-century magnetic interest its own

voice. To do so, she has to tackle a broad terrain, find examples in a variety of places and treat them from a range of appropriate perspectives. Thus successive chapters present different points of view, as the book moves through commerce, language, literature, iconography, popular culture, religion, professional navigation, and so on. It becomes clear that there was plenty of magnetical experiment, speculation, and professional application, but that it cannot be drawn into a single narrative. If there is a unifying thread, it concerns contests for authority in the different areas where magnetic activity is found. Medicine makes its appearance within the overall picture, in particular in the context of therapies involving "sympathetic" relationships, the practices of Franz Mesmer and of John de Mainauduc and the general area of animal magnetism.

Fara makes a virtue out of choosing an historical theme that cannot be treated in terms of coherence or developing consensus. One result is that the book is more self-regarding than is customary in historical monographs and the historiographical commentary offered to guide the reader can become wearing. The author's reply to the challenge that this is a study of a subject that does not represent a coherent discipline at the time would be, I think, that as an historiographical experiment, it is intended to do something else—to recognize and embrace diversity, incoherence and conflicts of interest, and to use these to enrich our understanding of the realities of eighteenth-century scientific culture.

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**Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton** (eds), *Women, science and medicine, 1500–1700*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1997, pp. xx, 292, illus., £40.00 (hardback 0-7509-1334-7), £14.99 (paperback 0-7509-1343-6).

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