

## Book Reviews

in the case of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, it was by writing to sexologists with descriptions of sexual behaviour that challenged pathological interpretations. Other sexologists, such as Hirschfeld, were gay themselves, and so projected relatively positive images of homosexuality. This “gay-liberation” trend continued throughout the history of scientific writing about homosexuality. Either the participants in the research were themselves homosexual, such as Jan Gay, Alfred Gross, or Thomas Painter, or researchers such as Alfred Kinsey and Evelyn Hooker linked into networks of homosexuals who supported the research that would present homosexuality in a more positive light. For the bulk of the pre-Hooker/pre-Kinsey work this involved using a psychiatric or medical model of homosexuality, and one of the achievements of Minton’s study is to show that there was a concerted effort to overthrow this model, not just by homosexuals themselves, but also by psychiatrists who wanted homosexuality removed as a category from the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and statistical manual*, something which happened in 1973 after pressure from gay psychiatrists and other activists. This change was necessary; there were problems with the medical model. Homosexuality was represented as an immature sexual expression, especially in the American psychiatric world dominated by psychoanalysis. But research emerged within psychological and sexological studies showing that it was not uncommon, that it was not necessarily linked to prostitution, and that homosexuals were not necessarily unhappy or criminal. This research had a strong emancipatory aspect that Minton makes clear in his book. Much current work critical of sexology has not focused on these challenges to the medical model both in and outside psychiatry, but rather has framed itself in a neo-Foucaultian way, showing how doctors had the power to pathologize “perverts”, and as such has missed many subtle points that Minton and Oosterhuis have brought to the fore.

Minton’s book is the best survey to date of medical opinions about homosexuality in America between 1900 and 1973. There still could have been more about the early sexologists,

as many of the ideas employed by later scientists—such as using non-psychiatric, non-legal cases to demonstrate that not all homosexuals were criminal or mad—already existed in non-American sex psychology. There is also excessive attention paid to Thomas Painter, whose hitherto unstudied biography dominates the text. Nevertheless, the book is an important contribution to the history of sexology.

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**Roy Porter**, *Bodies politic: disease, death and doctors in Britain 1650–1900*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001, pp. 328, 137 illus., £25.00 (hardback 0-8014-3953-1).

In *Bodies politic*, the late Roy Porter returned to the heterogeneous nature of medicine in the early modern period but added a new dimension, suggesting that historians should not be too quick to dismiss what visual images can say about the past. *Bodies politic* is not a book with glossy illustrations added, but an erudite and entertaining study that seeks to ask questions about the meanings behind the representations of the body and medicine and what symbolic significance they possessed in the period 1650 to 1900. The theme of representation holds *Bodies politic* together. Although the aim to explore these meanings is not always successfully achieved—some of the images are taken at face value—and the range of visual sources is limited, in investigating the interplay between the visual and the written as it portrayed the corporal and the medical, Porter’s narrative interweaves literary and pictorial evidence from across the period. In doing so, it draws together different strands in the history of medicine to examine the metaphorical commentary the body and healing supplied on the worlds of politics and the body politic in post-Reformation England. The principal focus, however, is on the years when Hogarth, Gillray and Rowlandson along with numerous novelists, social commentators and poets, were producing an

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outpouring of representations of disease, medicine and medical practitioners. In looking at these representations, Porter revisited themes encountered in his earlier work: the relations of patients with medical practitioners, the social position of practitioners, the concepts of illness, and the nature of therapeutic intervention.

Central to *Bodies politic* is the idea that in the long eighteenth century illness became more than dis-ease; it became representative of the social and political health of the nation. For Porter, medicine became a mode of theatre, a reassuring ritual, that satirists and commentators grasped, so that “artistic and literary devices wrung comment and comedy out of the interchangeability of people and diseases”.

The work moves from a study of the grotesque, monstrous body as a symbol of fallen flesh to a discussion of the harmonious, healthy body as expression of divine inspiration; from the body as a symbol of inner corruption to the management of the body. Preconceptions about class, gender and race underpinned these concerns. Where healthy bodies were to be prized, diseased bodies (as shown in the work of Rowlandson) could represent more than their symptoms at a time when “the agents of Illness were rendered into graphic foes”. Artists and social commentators were quicker than medical practitioners to show that illness represented disordered inner states.

Doctors’ inability to deal with these inner states, where the cure was often worse than the disease, fuelled antagonism to medical practitioners and their methods. The dynamics of this opposition are discussed in detail. Porter’s exposition reminds us that medical science could provoke distrust and fear; that doctors were readily associated with impropriety, although most of the disparaging caricatures were not unduly vicious and served as shorthand for the players in the traditional medical hierarchy. Nor did patients always come across well in an increasingly health conscious and consumerist society: they could be hero, victim or butt. In the face of this lampooning, practitioners initially responded with a self-generated rendering of themselves as scholarly and trustworthy whilst blackening the names of their competitors. With rising competition and a growing market for

medicine, tactics changed as orthodox practitioners started to engage in a battle of words and images to promote fame and fortune. *Bodies politic* demonstrates how elite physicians appeared to relish transgressive behaviour where their predecessors (and successors) courted respectability. Porter’s argument is that in the eighteenth century such activities were crucial in getting doctors known. However, this louche elite fed a “lasting negative public view of the profession” that proved hard for later doctors to shake as they tried to portray themselves as men of science and carved out occupational demarcations at a time when medicine was experiencing an “occupational flux”. In the focus on elite physicians, little is said about that emerging class of general practitioners who formed the mainstay of provincial practice. The medical fringe is included by implication or to highlight the insecurities of orthodox practitioners.

Porter addresses less familiar territory when exploring how the body and medical metaphors entered the political landscape. These metaphors formed an important component in political satire from the cartoon-idiom of the “Magna Farta” to the radical quack administering his political cure to John Bull. The book demonstrates how this medical theme reached its apogee under Henry Addington, prime minister between the two Pitt administrations of the early nineteenth century, and then again during Lord Sidmouth’s tenure as home secretary.

*Bodies politic* does venture into the nineteenth century, but presents a more conventional narrative. If the Victorian period receives less critical attention, the focus on the beliefs about the body and medical practices of early modern England offers an engaging, wide-ranging study of the theatre of medicine that has all the hallmarks of Porter’s dynamic style and ability to re-examine familiar territory in new ways. Although *Bodies politic* offers no radical new insights, it does provide a valuable introduction to representations of the body and of the medical encounter.

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