

Book Reviews

Struensee (1737–1772). The son of a Lutheran Pietist clergyman in Halle, Struensee studied medicine at the university there and learned early on the particular brand of reforming spirit that trusts in the righteousness of its own cause. But Struensee, whose active career of reform began after 1757, no longer felt bound to any religious motivation and moved in circles whose scepticism and political outcry against the despotic rule of kings (Prussian and Danish) was secular and professional. In Altona, near Hamburg, a traditional enclave of free thinking, Struensee began to publish on a wide range of reforming propositions whose strength was their encompassing foresight: that relief from illness and death for the population considered as a whole did not derive from individual cures, but depended on agricultural and economic change (free peasantry, a mercantile system not based on luxury goods); on fostering enlightenment in regard to unhelpful superstitious cures (abolishing certain forms of quackery), and on introducing better hygienic conditions and better education. These are traditional Enlightenment themes, and Struensee characteristically popularized his reforms in short-lived, because opposed, periodicals. He was obviously competent and rose to power, but as a rationalist on the slippery, smooth, and corrupt floors of the polished court of Christian VII of Denmark. He became Count Struensee, the *éminence grise* writing edicts for reform, mostly at night, while keeping in check a thoroughly unbalanced king, an orthodox clergy out for his blood, an unhappy military, and an aristocracy unfavourable to a rationalism upsetting the usual sources of income. He was beheaded in 1772 while the court danced and played to show its total unconcern.

These are the bare bones of a biography from which much could be gleaned about the role of a pre-revolutionary Enlightenment on the continent and its tragic commitment to reform. It is possible to extricate some of its history from Stefan Winkle's book, but only if one is well versed in reading between the lines. Unfortunately, Winkle falls for court gossip as if it were truth, not political manoeuvre. Winkle includes such a welter of confused excerpts taken from all manner of books that a student of the period can only gasp at the half-truths rewoven to support all the old clichés: the dark ages beaten back by one tragically enlightened medical man; bigoted orthodoxy; frivolous women poking for lice among their powdered and pomaded wigs – and so much more. Winkle makes much of the thrashing of the young in those cruel times, but it takes much thrashing to make a good historian. Mainly because historians, and not necessarily a physician collecting *aperçus*, learn the hard way to separate the wheat from the chaff.

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GEOFFREY EATOUGH (editor), *Fracastoro's syphilis* (ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs, 12), Liverpool, Francis Cairns, 1984, 8vo, pp. viii, 295, £17.50.

This new text, translation, commentary, and index will, it is hoped, direct attention to the most famous poem in Renaissance Latin, Fracastoro's *Syphilis*. The translation is accurate, the notes helpful, the discussion of medical problems judicious, and Dr Eatough's work supersedes in almost every way the standard English rendering by H. Wynne-Finch, 1935.

Yet at the same time, opportunities have been lost. Little attempt is made to study the development of Fracastoro's scientific ideas on the basis of the various surviving drafts of the poem and the book *On contagion*, or to place them against the broader background of discussions about syphilis (for which Proksch's *Geschichte der venereischen Krankheiten* is fuller than Luisinus and less polemical than Bloch). It is assumed that the theory of *semina morbi* in the poem must be the same tripartite theory of contagion as revealed in the later book, an impression strengthened by the placing of the discussion of the book before that of the poem. The Lucretian phrase, as argued in this journal, 1983, 27: 27, need not be so interpreted, and it is better to see Fracastoro as being led from problem to problem over almost four decades than as formulating the whole of his theory of contagion at a single stroke. Consideration of Weidmann's study of *De antipathia* (1979) and, still more, of Pellegrini's essential *Origini . . . della dottrina fracastoriana del contagium vivum* (1950) would perhaps have saved Dr Eatough from this error of perspective.

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Fracastoro was, like Leonardo, a universal man, and, perhaps for that very reason, has lacked an adequate biography. Rossi is jejune and outdated, and the harvest of Fracastoro's manuscripts is only just beginning. Hence, the old biography of W. P. Greswell, 1801, ed. 2, 1805, still has its uses, for it concentrates almost entirely on Fracastoro as a poet and philosopher and uses many primary texts. Dr Eatough speculates on possible contacts, including Copernicus, Fracastoro's contemporary at Padua (although no actual texts mention a meeting, and certainly not instruction), but fails to explore the ramifications of the group around Giberti in Verona. A closer study of Maddison's 1965 life of Marco Antonio Flaminio would have revealed long contacts between the poets, and attributed Fr. 2 to its rightful author, Flaminio himself.

Perhaps most serious in a work which aims to set Fracastoro in a literary context, there is little discussion of neo-Latin epic or its place in contemporary literary theory. Walter Ludwig has given us many hints, particularly in his study of Scaliger and Fracastoro (*Antike u. Abendland*, 1979, pp. 33–37) and his survey of renaissance didactic poetry (*Festschrift für Leonard Forster*, 1982, pp. 151–180), but these have not been exploited here. I would gladly have dispensed with the long computer index in favour of a more detailed and coherent introduction that integrated Fracastoro more fully into the mainstream of renaissance ideas. That is a task that needs to be done, and the material is there for any intrepid researcher. Within his own limits, Dr Eatough has produced an excellent edition and commentary, but he has not been bold enough to break with a traditional literary form.

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MICHAEL DRAKE (editor), *Population studies from parish registers. A selection of readings from Local Population Studies*, Matlock, Derbys., Local Population Studies, 1982, 8vo, pp. xxxiv, 220, £5.95 (paperback).

Michael Drake was wise to point out the pitfalls of using Parish Registers for population studies, but his long-winded discussion of omissions takes up valuable space in his introduction that could have been used to encourage the use of the registers with caution and in conjunction with other parish documents. His penultimate sentence entreats that "one should not despair of using Anglican parish registers" and it is to be hoped that students will not spend too many hours deciding that a particular register is useless for demography. All of the readings are from volumes of *Local Population Studies*, and one wonders why five of the contributions selected are from volume 24 of this journal. This selection has given the section on baptism in the book undue weight compared with marriage, burials, migration, and area studies. Many excellent articles based on parish registers are to be found in other journals, so that the notes, printed in full in this book, are useful and the index is excellent. The print is very poor in places and it is a pity that the Appendix 1 table had to be cut in two and appear on the back instead of facing page. If back copies of *Local Population Studies* are unobtainable, this book supplies a need for students concerned with historical demography, but it is of very little value for medical historians.

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JOHN K. CRELLIN, *Medical care in pioneer Illinois*, Springfield, The Pearson Museum, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, 1982, 8vo, pp. xi, 128, \$15.95.

Emerging from a study commissioned by the Department of Medical Humanities at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, this short volume is a chronicle of health and medicine in downstate Illinois (the author wisely omits Chicago and its vicinity). It is organized thematically – focusing in turn on such topics as health conditions, the diverse sources of medical care, and physicians' social and economic positions – and glides freely back and forth between Illinois statehood in 1818 and the end of the century, the study's chronological confines. Intended more for medical and lay audiences than for historians, much of the book resurveys the Illinois topography of nineteenth-century American medical terrain that has