

Book Reviews

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.

Jim Bennett,

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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).

The history of science and medicine has been greatly enriched in recent years by