

the greatest Catholic figures at court among his patients, including Cardinal Richelieu, whom he treated for syphilis. Still, for all his grace and charm, his position began to erode after the assassination of Henri IV. As the French court increasingly returned to Rome, Mayerne left for London, becoming a royal physician to King James in 1611, where his Calvinism and his chemical medicine would be less of a problem.

For Trevor-Roper, Mayerne's public persona was that of the Hippocratic chemist. Mayerne dissociated himself from the passionate polemics of Paracelsus, while consistently arguing that chemical medicine could be squared with the best traditions of Greek medicine. The Hippocratic commitment to clinical observation, found in the *Epidemics*, was clearly an important influence on Mayerne's own casebooks. He argued that the discovery of new remedies was precisely in keeping with the empiricism that Hippocrates had counselled, and that it was the very nature of medicine to progress. Though Trevor-Roper does not mention it, Mayerne argued that various Hippocratic texts, particularly *On ancient medicine*, clearly taught that the body contained chemical qualities in addition to the four qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry. These chemical qualities caused diseases and required chemical cures. Mayerne clearly argued these points in the only medical treatise published during his lifetime, the *Apologia* of 1603. Other Paracelsians of Mayerne's generation shared this view, as Jole Shackelford's recent study of Severinus' *Idea medicinae philosophicae* has shown. Mayerne was cautious in his public practice as a royal physician, using chemical remedies alongside many traditional ones and striving for co-operation and consensus among royal healers.

The very success of the book in portraying Mayerne's network of associates, however, raises anew the most difficult question for the interpretation of his life: how do we square his public persona with his private life? Mayerne always retained the sense of himself as an outsider. He thrived in Paris and London, without being at home in either place. When not in attendance at court, he returned to a domestic and personal world peopled by Huguenot exiles,

continental Calvinists, chemical apothecaries, and skilled craftsmen. He nurtured a lifelong interest in Hermetic, alchemical, and Rosicrucian principles. In Paris, he secretly met with a society of Hermetic thinkers known by code names. His letter book contains an outline of Rosicrucian principles, and his notebooks record his own alchemical experiments. This evidence is difficult to reconcile with Mayerne's public portrayal of himself as a moderate establishment chemist. There are inevitably some conflicts with the post-1979 historiography. Imagine writing this book without the recent work of Allen Debus, Bruce Moran, Lawrence Brockliss and Colin Jones, Jole Shackelford, I M Lonie, Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, and many others. Mayerne's Calvinism, for instance, is portrayed as a generalized Erasmian inclination to reform, almost devoid of theological content (pp. 11–13). Mayerne was indeed tolerant by the standards of his day, but recent research has demonstrated that many of his generation found Paracelsian metaphysics appealing precisely because they seemed to complement Protestant theology. Still, the extraordinary detective work underlying this book will establish it as the foundation for any further appraisals of Mayerne's life and as one of the richest and most enduring biographies of our day.

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Susan K Morrissey, *Suicide and the body politic in imperial Russia*, Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. xv, 384, illus., £55.00, \$99.00 (hardback 978-0-521-86545-6).

“You be Don Quixote but I've had enough.” The absurdity of the “worldly circus” led one Lieutenant Kvitsynskii, in 1852, to write this striking line in his suicide note and precipitate his own death with a pistol. A bemused civil servant in Tsar Nicholas I's security apparatus (the infamous and inquisitive Third Section) dryly recorded the death and quoted this note

without comment. Susan Morrissey tells us that the suicide motivated by boredom was a genre cultivated by some Russians who sought neither the heroic final gesture of the revolutionary martyr nor the tragic self-destruction of the deranged. Killing oneself had various meanings in imperial Russia, and those meanings and their arbiters are the subject of this vividly written study.

Examining a prodigiously varied array of sources, Morrissey shows how Russians enacted and interpreted self-killing from the sixteenth century to the eve of Revolution. For early modern Russians, the means of death mattered. Russian Orthodoxy, like western Christianity, regarded the suicide as a rebel against God, and his remains as polluted. Towns had “wretched houses” on their outskirts for suicides, those who died inexplicable deaths, and strangers’ remains. Drinking oneself to death was a dishonourable exit in Russian religious and secular views. Significant shifts in regulation came with the dissenting Orthodox Old Believers’ late-seventeenth-century revolts, in the form of mass immolation. These fiery rejections of authority were the first use in Russia of self-destruction as political protest. Peter the Great responded in part by criminalizing attempted suicide in his westernized military; noteworthy exceptions were made for men suffering from “torment” and “madness”—foreseeing an insanity defence. He also tried to shift the suicide’s body from the “wretched house” to the autopsy chamber. Russia’s rulers would not complete this shift from sin to crime, and thence to a medicalized, social issue, until the late imperial era. Morrissey argues that Russians followed this general European trajectory but with significant distinctions; she also contends, and diligently demonstrates, how the sacred permeated the secular, how the medical metaphor served political ends. Russians approaching the suicide and his claims did so with “a kind of cultural reflexivity. Often convinced of their own backwardness, Russians constantly looked to Europe in order to interpret past and present experiences and to anticipate future developments” (p. 9).

Romantic sensibility, medical professionalization and the appearance of Russian statisticians in the early nineteenth century all tempered

views of suicide, leading to decriminalization in 1845. A new crime, abuse of authority, made serf-owners liable if a serf killed himself, and forensic autopsies provided the evidence. Yet Russia’s backwardness meant suicide was less prevalent than in Europe—a Europe Russia understood itself to be joining, albeit at a huge delay. With the Great Reforms of the 1860s (freeing serfs, transforming the courts) doctors seized upon suicide, and the flow of European medical literature on it, to produce constructions of self-killing as the result of “pathologies of the self” (pp. 194–202). Psychiatry’s “new toolbox of diagnostic terms” (p. 201) enabled Russia’s doctors to prescribe for the body politic. Implicitly and explicitly their prescriptions were a critique of the “kingdom of darkness”—the autocratic patriarchal order that persisted, despite accelerating modernity.

That modernity yielded a political opposition devoted to terrorism; the political suicide now re-entered public life as socialist “martyrs”, and cheated the executioner in Siberian camps and Petersburg fortresses. Psychiatrists and medical experts responded ambivalently to the escalation of violence after 1905’s abortive revolution. Some discerned a “revolutionary psychosis” that was purifying and positive, while most began to see terrorists’ suicidal “martyrdom” as “insane and meaningless violence” caused by degeneration (p. 291). Medical experts confronting suicide (as with so many other socio-medical problems in late imperial Russia) see-sawed between an oppositional stance to tsarist patriarchy and a guarded awareness that only by engaging with the state could medical professions exist.

This brief summary of the medical highlights of this lucid and subtly textured book can only hint at the wealth within. In scale and ambition it will remind readers of Laura Engelstein’s magisterial *The keys to happiness: sex and the search for modernity in fin-de-siècle Russia* (Ithaca, 1992). Like that work, Morrissey’s book should be read by all historians of modernity—medical, cultural, social and political.

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