

character, feeling and the sentiments by the time of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental journey* (1768). In this context the re-presentation of Rousseau's path-breaking essays provides students with an easily accessible series of articles from an author who has contributed, perhaps more than any other, to the identification and development of nervous theory and its role in a range of medical, scientific and literary texts. Where the book is, perhaps, less successful is in its attempt to colonize a new territory for these seminal articles by stretching out the centrality of nerve theory—in linear style—from the eighteenth century to the present day.

Describing the post-eighteenth century in terms of a “nervous civilization”, without any clear reference to Freud's original usage of the term, Rousseau argues that the concept of “nervousness” cumulatively increased in cultural capital—“the working classes—even farmers and rustics—began to ape the upper classes; it was only a matter of time before nerves—especially damaged and shattered nerves—would become mankind's common lot” (p. 54). By the 1800s, then, “nervousness” had reached the scale of a new national identity, most particularly applicable to collective groups of urban dwellers living in “the rat race” (p. 64). If this leap seems dubious, reflecting as it does a filter-down model to the dynamics of psycho- and socio-development that is now relatively outmoded, still more so is his claim that the world we inhabit today is “paradoxically far more ‘nervous’ than it was in the eighteenth century”. Furthermore, “doubtlessly there is even more nervous fatigue and stress, and perhaps even more depression and mental illness, than ever before in history and with no sign of improvement” (p. 345). And yet a crucial footnote here undermines the validity of Rousseau's statement: “the evidence is divided on this point, with roughly half of demographers believing there is more” (p. 349, n. 9). Roughly half, in other words, do not.

It is not sufficient to shift from “nervous acts” of the eighteenth century (with their undeniable “discursive, literary, rhetorical, metaphorical, epistemological, ontological, and even

theological profile” [p. 69]), to a coda on “discursivity and the pharmacological future” (p. 68), which treads a clear path between Dr Jenner's nineteenth-century ‘Neuropathic remedy’ and the “arrival of the large pharmaceuticals, the Glaxos and Pfizers” in meeting the needs of modern peoples, their lives “ever more stressful in late capitalism” as “personal depression of many protean shapes disguises its earlier versions” (p. 69). Leaving aside the problem of the lack of evidence for Rousseau's claims, then, there is the equally important point that—as historians of emotion are increasingly acknowledging—we cannot identify “depression” or “mental illness”, or “stress” as stable categories that are comparable across time and cultures. Stress, anxiety and nervousness (the latter of which Rousseau's earlier essays demonstrate) all exist within their own cultures of time, space and belief. Retrospective diagnosis of eighteenth-century peoples—holding “similar attitudes, albeit still inchoate and anticipatory of what was to come”—does little to help us understand “modern nervousness” (pp. 347–8). Nor does it do justice to the relevance and innovativeness of Rousseau's own articles to concepts of nerves and nervousness in specific historical contexts.

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Robert Richardson and Hilary S Morris,

History of medicine: with commentaries.
Shrewsbury, Quiller Press, 2005, pp. viii,
278, £16.95 (paperback 1-904057-76-4).

This volume's vague title and anonymous cover art conceal a deeply unusual premise. In the words of the accompanying press release, Richardson and Morris attempt “an imaginative account of the progress of medical knowledge told in the form of the autobiography of a physician born some 2700 years BC”. The result is a triumphant (not to say triumphalist) sight-seeing trip through the scenes of western

medicine's "greatest hits", beginning in the fleshpots of Akkadian Mesopotamia and ending in the laboratory of Robert Koch. Our host—who carries his learning with the solemnity due to one who is almost five thousand years old by the end of the book—is initially named "Bal-sarra-uzur", though this Babylonian handle has been dropped in favour of "Paul Baldassare" by the time he and his companion Telesphorus reach medieval Europe.

According to the blurb, the book—a revised and expanded edition of Richardson's *Medicine through the ages with Dr Baldassare* (1999)—is intended as a general guide and revision aid for final-year A-level students, undergraduates and those studying for the Diploma in the History of Medicine of the Society of Apothecaries. In line with the demands of this readership, Richardson and Morris—a medical practitioner and historian, and an Apothecaries Lecturer in the History of Medicine respectively—aim to edify and educate in roughly equal measure. Each of the 22 chapters finds Bal-sarra-uzur/Baldassare in what the authors consider to be a key moment in the history of medicine: the teachings of Hippocrates, the European response to the Black Death, the rise of Paris medicine and so on. He talks or writes to the relevant "great men", and ruminates on the state of medicine and the spirit of the age. Each chapter begins with a time-line of relevant events in European history and ends with a "commentary"—six or seven numbered points explaining names or terms used in the text—and a list of sources for the authors' imaginative reconstructions.

Such a method has obvious advantages and disadvantages. Contemporary historians might question the unrelentingly progressive rhetoric and the absence of any reference to Chinese or Indian medical cultures, but Richardson and Morris provide a comprehensive (though admittedly traditionalist) exposition of the history of western medicine and have an easy gift for evoking the feel of the past through judicious use of illuminating detail. Their highly imaginative approach is far more engaging than a straightforward recitation of the facts (if not on a par with the Socratic

dialogue Richardson alludes to in his preface) and the amount of information they have packed into less than 300 pages is at times astounding.

Where this book falls down is in its poor characterization. Both the central character and the historical actors are rendered in a wooden and earnest style, leavened with only an occasional flash of (creaky) humour. The dialogue, too, lacks vitality, full of over staged debates and long passages of exposition. This is a real problem when it comes to writing for the authors' stated audience: though the content of the book may be too advanced and detailed for A-level students, it is difficult to imagine its rather naïve style appealing to anyone beyond this age. *History of medicine* is a brave and original book, but Roy Porter's *The greatest benefit to mankind* (1997) still provides a better introduction to the history of medicine.

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Tom Atkinson, *Napiers history of herbal healing, ancient and modern*, Edinburgh, Luath Press, 2003, pp. x, 272, illus., £16.99 (hardback 1-84282-025-7).

The overlap, interaction and rivalry between medical herbalism and official medicine in Britain form an interesting subject. This book sets out to illustrate these interconnections using the history of one family business of herbalists. Napiers was founded in 1860 by Duncan Napier and is now a thriving multi-outlet business.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is an over-ambitious world history of herbalism. Such a vast subject cannot be adequately covered in seventy pages. Strictly, much of this first part is a history of medicine rather than of herbalism itself, and it is perhaps unwise of the author to try to cover such disparate traditions as the ancient Babylonian, Roman, Arabic, Chinese and Indian ones. Since the aim of the book is to present the history of one firm of Edinburgh herbalists, it might have been preferable to omit much of this and concentrate on the origin and history of